

**NON-NATURALISM AND THE METAPHYSICS
OF NORMATIVE PROPERTIES**

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Abstract

Normative non-naturalists seem to be committed to a supervenience relation about the normative. This means that the normative necessarily varies with the non-normative, such that the normative features of a person or a thing cannot change if the non-normative features of that person or that thing do not change either. Furthermore, according to normative non-naturalists, normative properties are metaphysically discontinuous with non-normative properties, as the former are irreducible to the latter and cannot be exhaustively understood in terms of the latter. However, it is not clear that normative non-naturalists can explain the necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative they themselves seem to maintain; this is the core of the problem of supervenience. In order to respond to the problem of supervenience, non-naturalists could either try to explain the necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative, or deny that this necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative holds. I first define normative non-naturalists' theoretical commitments and give a few reasons to take this view seriously (Chapter 1), and then I explain how the problem of supervenience against non-naturalism should be understood (Chapter 2). Then, I argue that there are issues with the most convincing attempts to explain the necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative (Chapter 3) and with the most convincing attempts to deny this necessary connection (Chapter 4). My conclusion is then that non-naturalists do not have a convincing response to the problem of supervenience.

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Introduction

Normative non-naturalism is the view in metanormativity or metaethics according to which the normative is *sui generis*, that is to say (i) that the normative cannot be reduced to the non-normative or to the natural, and (ii) that the normative cannot be understood in non-normative terms or in natural terms. The reaction to non-naturalism has fluctuated importantly since the publication of G.E. Moore's book *Principia Ethica* (1903). At some point considered as a view that we absolutely need to avoid for fear of being plainly ridiculous, many philosophers now believe that normative non-naturalism, particularly when applied to the moral domain, is the best view to explain some of our basic or fundamental intuitions about normativity and morality (Cuneo 2007, 2013; Cuneo and Shafer-Landau 2014; Dancy 2006; Enoch 2011; FitzPatrick 2008; Huemer 2005; Leary 2017; Shafer-Landau 2003; Wedgwood 2007; Wielenberg 2014).

Some of these intuitions would include, without being limited to, the fact that our normative judgments express beliefs that could be true or false,¹ the fact that normativity and morality cannot be understood in non-normative, in non-moral, or in natural terms, and the fact that normative facts can give us categorical reasons but that natural facts cannot. These intuitions also seem supported by the way we react to cases and examples, such as Gilbert Harman's classic example of our observation of "some children pour gasoline on a cat and ignite it" (1977, 4). It seems like a sensible reaction to this observation would be to form the normative judgment that what the children are doing is wrong. This judgment, at least on the face of it, seems to express a belief that could be true or false. Also, it seems like the wrongness of the action is something over and above its non-normative or natural properties. In other words, by the

¹ Normative realists (naturalists or not), unlike error theorists, believe that some of these beliefs are true.

normative judgment that “what the children are doing is wrong”, it seems like we are expressing something that cannot be expressed merely by describing the natural properties of the children’s action. Hence, at least according to many philosophers, we seem to have this intuition that there is something more to normativity and morality than what could be expressed in non-normative or non-moral terms. This does not necessarily mean that normativity and morality cannot be reduced to the non-normative or to the non-moral, but it does suggest that non-naturalists say something meaningful when they say that the normative is *sui generis*. Finally, the wrongness of the action seems to give some reasons to act that natural properties do not: it may give to the children a reason not to do such an action, and it may give to the bystanders a reason to ease the cat’s pain. Furthermore, we seem to believe that the wrongness of the action gives to the children and the bystanders these respective reasons no matter what they want to do or no matter what their desires are. Hence, again according to many philosophers, only normative facts can give us categorical reasons to act (although this does not mean that *all* normative facts can give us categorical reasons to act). In order to explain this, we would need to assume that normative facts are importantly different from natural facts; something that would also support the claim that normativity cannot be understood in natural terms. However, to get a better sense of what non-naturalism is about, it is useful first to introduce the other main family of normative realists: the naturalists.

According to the naturalists, normative facts and properties² are natural, just as psychological, sociological, and biological properties are all natural properties. Naturalists could be either reductionists or non-reductionists. An example of a non-reductionist naturalist is Nicholas Sturgeon (1988, 239–40):

² I will often only use the term “property;” this will be done merely for the sake of simplicity.

Naturalism is in one clear sense a “reductionist” doctrine of course, for it holds that moral facts are nothing but natural facts. What I deny, however, is that from this metaphysical doctrine about what sort of facts moral facts are, anything follows about the possibility of reduction in another sense (to which I shall henceforth confine the term) more familiar from the philosophical literature: that is, about whether moral expressions can be given reductive definitions in some distinctive nonmoral vocabulary, in which any plausible moral explanations could be recast.

Sturgeon’s non-reductionism, at least in this quote, seems to be limited to moral expressions, or to moral terms and predicates. Non-reductionists could also argue not only that normative (or moral) terms are irreducible to non-normative (or non-moral) terms,³ but also that normative properties are irreducible to non-normative properties.

For reductionist naturalists, things are different. For them, it is because normative properties are reducible to non-normative and natural properties that we should consider the former type of properties natural. An example could be that, assuming that classical utilitarianism is the correct first order ethical theory, the property “moral rightness” – a normative property – is reducible to the natural property “maximizing utility”. Hence, *if* any such simple reduction could go through, the normative property “moral rightness” would be natural because reducible to a natural property. However, it is far from being obvious that any such simple reduction could go through as, first, there seems to be a countless of ways something could be morally right, and, second, this countless of ways may be too heterogeneous to be cashed out by “maximizing utility”. This suggests that any attempt to reduce a normative property to *one* simple non-normative or natural property is doomed to failure.

Reductionist naturalists could also take a different path, and, rather than arguing that a normative property is reducible to one simple non-normative property,⁴ they could argue that a normative property is reducible to a disjunctive non-normative natural property (a “descriptive

³ This possibility is often described as a non-analytic form of reductionism.

⁴ The property “maximizing utility” could be an example of a simple property.

property”, according to Frank Jackson (1998, 117–18)). These reductionists start with the assumption that normative properties are “second-order” properties, that is to say that they depend on other properties to be instantiated or to exist.⁵ The next step consists in saying that it is possible to construct a disjunctive property that will consist of all the properties upon which a given normative property supervenes. Both the normative property and the disjunctive property will be identical, because each property will entail the other: each time there is an instantiation of the normative property, there is an instantiation of the disjunctive property, and each time there is an instantiation of the disjunctive property, there is an instantiation of the normative property. Both properties being co-extensive, they will be identical. This means that the normative property is now identical with, and reduced to, the disjunctive natural property.

However, it is not clear that reducing a property to a disjunction of properties or to a disjunctive property could count as a real reduction.⁶ This last point is also supported by the idea that the disjunctive natural property would have to be heterogeneous. It would have to be heterogeneous (i.e. a diverse or disparate collection) as there are a countless number of ways something could, for instance, be wrong; ways that may have no relation to each other.⁷ Otherwise, reductionists will probably try to introduce a straightforward reduction to a simple non-normative natural property. This idea that the disjunctive property would have to be heterogeneous would prevent a reduction of normative properties to non-normative properties. Similarly, someone like John McDowell could say that the normative is shapeless with respect to the non-normative, meaning that there is no interesting way to characterize all the things that are

⁵ It is important to note that this does not beg the question against non-naturalism; naturalists and non-naturalists could all agree that normative properties are second-order (or higher-order) properties.

⁶ For more on this, see Jaegwon Kim’s paper “Multiple Realization and the Metaphysics of Reduction” (1992).

⁷ Jerry Fodor makes this point for special sciences, which I think can also be true in the normative and moral cases: “The problem all along has been that there is an open empirical possibility that what corresponds to the natural kind predicates of a reduced science may be a heterogeneous and unsystematic disjunction of predicates in the reducing science, and we do not want the unity of science to be prejudiced by this possibility” (1974, 108, see also 111-12).

– let us say – wrong by the means of one non-normative referent (Kirchin 2010; McDowell 1981). Hence, trying to reduce a normative property to a complex, disjunctive non-normative or natural property, seems completely misguided as, even if this would be possible, it would not count as a real reduction at all.

Non-naturalists are like non-reductionist naturalists in the sense that they believe that normativity is somehow irreducible, but they are unlike naturalists – both reductionist and non-reductionist – in the sense that they do not believe that normative properties *are* natural properties. Hence, non-naturalists are more “radical” than most non-reductionist naturalists, as they maintain not only that normative concepts and terms cannot be understood in non-normative or natural terms, but that the whole normative domain (including normative properties) cannot be understood in non-normative or natural terms. Indeed, non-naturalists deny the main claim that is motivating naturalism, namely that normativity is best understood as being natural or part of the natural world.⁸ For non-naturalists, this would represent an important mistake, and the consequence of such a mistake is that we would have denied what is so special about the normative, or what makes the normative what it is. Maybe some non-reductionist naturalists could maintain something similar, but this is still a largely unexplored territory and it is at the risk of collapsing non-reductionist naturalism into non-naturalism.

However, all this does not mean that non-naturalists regard normative properties as *supernatural*, although the label “*non-naturalism*” might suggest something like this. Rather, for non-naturalists, normative properties are neither natural nor *supernatural*; they are *sui generis*

⁸ The natural world includes here the psychological and sociological facts and properties. Also, unless we say that the normative is a subpart of the human domain, the natural world also includes the human domain in general.

properties.⁹ In other words, according to non-naturalists, normative properties are *metaphysically sui generis*.¹⁰ At this level of generality, the difference between naturalism and non-naturalism, or even more importantly between non-reductionist naturalism and non-naturalism, might not be very clear. However, it is important to note that the irreducibility of normative properties is not the issue that differentiates naturalism from non-naturalism. For the latter, normative properties are *sui generis* in a sense that entails irreducibility, but is not entailed by it. In other words, saying that *x* is *sui generis* implies that *x* is irreducible to *y* but saying that *x* is irreducible to *y* does not imply that *x* is *sui generis*.¹¹

Non-naturalism about the normative is appealing to many, and for strong reasons. Indeed, if true, non-naturalism may be the view that will give us all we want to explain about the normative: explaining how some of our beliefs about the normative are true, explaining how what we say about the normative cannot be completely explained in non-normative terms, and explaining how normativity seems to have this special hold on us. Hence, for non-naturalists, naturalism cannot explain *all* these features we believe constitute normativity. This is so because reducing a normative property to a simple non-normative property appears unlikely, because a reduction to a complex non-normative property seems not to be a real reduction, and because non-reductionist naturalists seem to fail to explain what is so special about normativity.

⁹ Saying that normative properties are neither natural nor supernatural properties is, I think, the best way to understand non-naturalism. However, Killoren has a different understanding: he prefers to consider “supernatural” and “non-natural” as being synonymous (2016, 230). To be fair to non-naturalists, I think their view is best understood as claiming that normative properties are *sui generis* or of their own metaphysical kind, rather than a subclass of supernatural properties (see Wielenberg 2014, 14). Although I do not have a definition of “supernatural property” to offer, the property of “being commanded by God” is a paradigmatic example of this family of properties.

¹⁰ This notion of being “metaphysically *sui generis*” is thoroughly defined and explained in section 1.1.3.

¹¹ In section 1.1, I explore further what are the core theoretical commitments of non-naturalism.

However, normative non-naturalism is not without problems, and, at least according to the critics of non-naturalism, these problems are of great importance. Following the very influential paper published by Sharon Street in 2006, “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value”, epistemological issues with non-naturalism have been largely discussed. Most non-naturalists have seriously considered these issues as being very important and have introduced careful responses to these issues. Yet, epistemological issues are not the only issues non-naturalists are facing; they must also respond to very important and urgent *metaphysical issues*. One of these issues consists in explaining how we could include in our ontology some facts and properties that are not natural, and this issue draws some of its meaning and force from the fact that most critics of non-naturalists endorse methodological naturalism, namely the view according to which the natural sciences are the best means to discover what should be included in our ontology.

Another metaphysical issue, intimately related to the previous, has to do with how we are supposed to explain the relation between the normative domain and the non-normative (or natural) domain. At first glance, it seems obvious that the normative and the non-normative stand in a close relation to one another, as we tend to believe that someone is a good person (a normative property) because she also has some non-normative characteristics (e.g. because of the actions she is doing or the things she says). In this sense, we tend to believe that normative features result from other properties, as it seems odd to think about someone or something that would have a normative feature (e.g. being good or being bad) without also having some kind of non-normative feature. In other words, someone or something cannot be *merely* good or bad; she or it must also have some non-normative features to be either good or bad. Furthermore, not only can someone or something not be merely good or bad, but we also seem to believe that if two

persons or two things are non-normatively indistinguishable (that is to say, if they both share all the same non-normative features, either only intrinsic properties or also extrinsic properties) they are also normatively indistinguishable. What exactly would be the explanation of why we believe so should stay, at least for now, an open question.

All these thoughts seem to suggest that there is a *supervenience relation* in the normative domain: that the normative supervenes upon the non-normative. How exactly we should understand the supervenience relation in the normative domain will be explained in sections 2.1 and 2.2, but we could already say that, if the normative supervenes upon the non-normative, then the normative must vary with the non-normative. More specifically, it means that the normative cannot vary if the non-normative does not vary, and that the normative can vary only if the non-normative does vary.

Because they believe that the normative is *sui generis*, it seems like non-naturalists do not have a straightforward explanation of the supervenience relation between the normative and the non-normative. This is the main reason why “the problem of supervenience”, namely the problem for non-naturalists consisting in explaining supervenience, has traditionally taken a focal role in assessments of the truth and likelihood of non-naturalism. Simon Blackburn was probably the first to articulate a version of the problem of supervenience (Blackburn 1993b, 1993c), and we can also detect a similar problem in John Leslie Mackie’s assessment of normative non-naturalism (Mackie 1977). However, although many agree that non-naturalists have issues explaining the supervenience relation between the normative and the non-normative, how exactly the problem of supervenience should be understood is debatable.

One of the goals of this thesis is to assess this issue, and to determine to what exactly non-naturalists should respond when they respond to the problem of supervenience. This issue is not perfectly clear in the literature as there seems to be a disagreement about exactly what is at issue for non-naturalists with the problem of supervenience (McPherson 2012; Miller 2017; Mitchell forthcoming). In other words, one of the goals of this thesis is to assess how we should understand the problem of supervenience. This will be the topic of the second chapter, while the first chapter will be devoted to introducing normative non-naturalism, the reasons to believe in it, and more details about the different issues the defenders of this view are facing.

However, the main goal of this thesis, and its most original and important contribution to the literature, is to assess non-naturalists' responses to the problem of supervenience. I foresee two general possibilities to respond to the problem of supervenience, and the third and fourth chapters will each be about one of these possibilities. My conclusion is that normative non-naturalists have no convincing response to the problem of supervenience. However, as I shall explain both in the third and in the fourth chapters, my argument is inductive as it consists in assessing as many responses to the problem of supervenience as possible. As with all inductive arguments, my conclusion is likely rather than certain. Nevertheless, I think my argument is cogent, and that non-naturalists should take the problem of supervenience very seriously, probably more seriously than they are right now.

Chapter 1: Normative Realism and Non-naturalism

The goal of this chapter is to introduce what normative non-naturalism¹² is – and what it is not – by identifying and explaining the core theoretical commitments of this view. The purpose is to get to a definition of non-naturalism that is interesting and specific enough, without getting to a definition of non-naturalism that is so specific that it could be maintained only by a few non-naturalists. I will also introduce a few reasons to believe in non-naturalism, reasons that should justify taking this view seriously. In the last section of this chapter, I will introduce two categories of issues that non-naturalists are facing: epistemological and metaphysical. The point will be to give an overview of these issues, and to acknowledge the importance of the epistemological issues, even if they will have to be set aside.

1.1. The Core Theoretical Commitments of Non-naturalism

Minimally, non-naturalists in metaethics are committed to the following claim (Cuneo and Shafer-Landau 2014, 401):¹³

- (1) The core claim: there are non-natural normative truths.

For Terence Cuneo and Russ Shafer-Landau, a non-natural normative truth is a “true [normative] proposition that is not identical with or made true exclusively by some natural fact” (2014, 401).^{14, 15} This is, as I said, the least non-naturalists are committed to. The reason why non-

¹² I will often use the expressions “non-naturalism” and “non-naturalists”; by these expressions, I always refer to non-naturalists that are also *realists*. Hence, by “non-naturalism” or “non-naturalists”, I will never refer to a view that could be deemed non-naturalist but not realist.

¹³ Cuneo and Shafer-Landau are only talking about *moral* truths, facts, and properties. However, I think that, at least for most cases, what is said about moral truths, facts, and properties can also be said about *normative* truths, facts, and properties. For this reason, and for the sake of uniformity, I have changed the occurrences of “moral” in Cuneo and Shafer-Landau to “normative.”

¹⁴ In the following pages, I will discuss various ways to unpack and understand this claim.

naturalists must maintain this claim (or its equivalent) is because it is essential, for someone to be a normative realist, that she maintains that there are normative truths; and it is essential, for a realist to be a non-naturalist, that she maintains that (at least some) normative truths are non-natural. Of course, this does not mean that all realists would mean the same thing by “normative truths”, and for sure it does not mean that all realists would say that these truths are non-natural, but it means that all realists should agree that there are normative truths *and* that all non-naturalists should agree that some of them are non-natural. Neither does it mean that only realists could say that there are normative truths. Other metaethicists could also maintain that there are normative truths, like constructivists are maintaining (Korsgaard 1996; Street 2008). Hence, the idea is simply that all realists are committed to the claim that there are normative truths, and for non-naturalists those truths (or some of them¹⁶) are going to be non-natural.¹⁷

From (1), there are different options non-naturalists could take; Cuneo and Shafer-Landau identify two of them. The first is importantly weaker than the second, and I shall argue in a moment that this option is in all likelihood inconsistent with how non-naturalists will understand (1). The second is, I believe, more likely to represent what most non-naturalists maintain. Here there are, as understood by Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, these two options (2014, 403):

¹⁵ Cuneo and Shafer-Landau do not provide sufficient and necessary conditions that something must fulfill to be seen as “natural”. Although, they believe we could go along with a more indirect strategy, which mainly consists in assembling a pair of lists. On the first list there will be “terms that would refer to entities that most parties to these debates would agree are natural, say, because these entities are empirically knowable, or play an explanatory role in the usual sciences (or are wholly constructible from or reducible to entities that play such an explanatory role)” (2014, 402). All the other terms will be on a second list, and they represent terms that *could* refer to non-natural entities. Whether these terms actually refer to non-natural entities must be seen as an open question (i.e. moral term could be understood as non-natural while nevertheless referring to natural properties). I doubt whether such an indirect strategy to define the natural is satisfactory, but it might represent the best we can do if we are not very confident that we could agree on necessary and sufficient conditions that make something natural.

¹⁶ Normative non-naturalists do not have to maintain that *all* normative truths are non-natural. For instance, a non-naturalist could argue that truths about fashion are normative truths (something that a non-naturalist could also deny), but that these truths are natural (e.g. they could be explained by natural facts alone).

¹⁷ Whether we can know these truths is a further question, although an important majority of normative realists are confident that we can know at least some of them.

(2) Minimal non-naturalism: there are non-natural normative truths, but there are no non-natural normative properties or facts; all normative properties and facts are natural.

(3) Robust non-naturalism: there are both non-natural normative truths and non-natural normative properties and facts.

The reason why (2) is likely to be inconsistent with (1), according to non-naturalists, is because of what is implied by (1), that is to say that there are true propositions with moral or normative content that are not identical with or exhaustively made true by natural facts (I will discuss this point further in a moment). It is safe to assume that, for non-naturalists, natural facts cannot have any kind of normative content. Otherwise, they would be normative facts.¹⁸

(2) is most likely inconsistent with (1) as it seems odd that non-naturalists could maintain that there are non-natural normative truths without also postulating non-natural normative entities. For instance, a metaethical constructivist could explain how normative propositions are true even if there are no normative facts and properties. Indeed, she could say that some normative propositions are true because these propositions have successfully been through a procedure of deliberation or of reflective endorsement, and that this very procedure is what makes these propositions true.¹⁹ However, this type of answer does not seem to be available to the non-naturalist, and for at least two reasons. First, I understand non-naturalists as being committed to descriptivism, like normative realists in general. That means that they believe that normative judgments aim at describing the (normative) world. Second, I understand non-naturalists as maintaining a robust view of normative (and moral) truth. Hence, I take William FitzPatrick to be right when he claims that, for non-naturalists, “the truth conditions for ethical

¹⁸ The reverse is most likely true. Indeed, the normative fact “it is wrong to kick a dog for the fun of it” has, somehow, natural (or perhaps more accurately non-normative) content built into it, namely the action type “kicking a dog for the fun of it”.

¹⁹ There could be normative facts for constructivists, but in the actual context I am using “fact” as meaning something like “attitude-independent fact”. For constructivists, normative facts, if they exist, are attitude-dependent entities. Furthermore, constructivists do not maintain Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s definition of non-natural normative truth.

claims [are not tied] to the results of deliberations from some standpoint favorably characterized by some set of ethically neutral criteria” (2008, 183).²⁰ According to this robust understanding of normative truth, what would make some normative propositions or claims true is that they correctly describe some normative facts or correctly ascribe some normative properties to actions, events or states of affairs. In other words, this means that non-naturalists are committed to the claim that, following Cristian Constantinescu, we could name “correspondence”: normative sentences are true when they correspond to normative facts (2014, 155).²¹ This claim, “correspondence”, goes hand in hand with the claim that normative judgments aim at describing the (normative) world.

Thus, it seems like the conjunction of (1) and (2) cannot really be what non-naturalists want to maintain or do maintain. Hence, I shall understand non-naturalism as being committed to (3), although it is crucial to note that this claim *might* be understood in different ways. Indeed, there could be a way of understanding (3) that would be, in a sense, deflationary: (3) could be understood as a “non-metaphysical” claim. Under this interpretation of (3), it would be possible to maintain, as Derek Parfit does, that normative properties exist, but not in an ontological sense (2011b, 479).²² This understanding of (3) will be the topic of the next section. I consider the following section necessary to get to a proper understanding of non-naturalists’ commitments.

²⁰ To get a better idea of what is meant by this stronger understanding of normative truth, and the difference between non-naturalists’ and constructivists’ understanding of normative truth, see FitzPatrick (2008).

²¹ Constantinescu is also only talking about moral truths, facts, and properties. For the sake of consistency, I have changed all the occurrences of “moral” in Constantinescu (2014) to “normative”.

²² I limit the discussion to Parfit’s view, but a similar view is often attributed to Dworkin (1996, 2011), Kramer (2009), Nagel (1986, 1997), and Scanlon (1998, 2003, 2014).

1.1.1. Parfit's Non-Metaphysicalism

Parfit calls his view “Non-Metaphysical Non-Naturalist Normative Cognitivism” (or “Non-Metaphysical Cognitivism” for short),²³ and there is how he defines it (Parfit 2011b, 486):

There are some claims that are irreducibly normative in the reason-involving sense, and are in the strongest sense true. But these truths have no ontological implications. For such claims to be true, these reason-involving properties need not exist either as natural properties in the spatio-temporal world, or in some non-spatio-temporal part of reality.

The most important contribution of “Non-Metaphysical Cognitivism” is the idea that some claims have no ontological implications in the sense that, even when true, these claims do not require that something exists in “some ontological sense” (2011b, 479). It is in this sense that this reading of (3) is, if possible, deflationary.

To maintain his view, Parfit makes an analogy with mathematics. For instance, the true mathematical claim “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” does not have, or at least this is Parfit’s claim, a positive ontological implication. And, just as no one is doubting that the claim “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” is true even if we do not believe that numbers or mathematical relations exist in space and time, we should not doubt that some normative claims are true even if things like “being a reason to do something” and “being the obligatory thing to do” do not exist in space and time.

In other terms, what Parfit maintains is that there is more than one understanding of the term “exist”. When we say that the claim “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” is true, we are implying that the numbers 2 and 4 exist, but not in the same sense as the computer in front of me exists. The former sense of “exist” is not ontological, whereas the latter is; and because the former sense of “exist” is not ontological, saying that the numbers 2 and 4 exist has no positive ontological implication according to Parfit. Furthermore, saying that something exists not in an ontological sense seems

²³ Parfit also calls his view “Rationalism”, although, as should become clear later, “Rationalism” seems to be a more specific commitment of non-naturalists.

to be understood by Parfit as saying that something exists but not in space or time, as abstract entities exist but not in space or time (2011b, 484). But, Parfit claims, saying that abstract entities exist in some “non-spatio-temporal part of reality” would also be misleading.

This is probably best explained by the fact that Parfit is committed to what he calls the “No Clear Question View” about abstract entities and some truths (2011b, 476). Applied to numbers, this view suggests that the following question is too unclear to have an answer (2011b, 476):

Do numbers really exist in a fundamental, ontological sense, though they do not exist in space or time?

Answering “yes” to this question would mean that numbers exist, but in a non-spatio-temporal part of reality. However, if we believe, as Parfit does, that such a question is severely unclear, we should resist answering either “yes” or “no” to it; and hence resist that we must be committed to the idea that numbers either exist in a spatio-temporal or in a non-spatio-temporal part of the world.²⁴ Parfit maintains that roughly the same thing holds for normative and moral truths.

To fully appreciate what Parfit is claiming here, it is worthwhile introducing one opponent to the non-metaphysical cognitivist, namely the metaphysical cognitivist.²⁵ Metaphysical cognitivists are like non-metaphysical cognitivists in the sense that they believe that some normative claims are true. However, for metaphysical cognitivists, in order to determine which claims about the normative domain are true, we would have to determine “what exists, *in an ontological sense*” (Parfit 2011b, 479; emphasis is mine). For Parfit, this is usually what we mean when we say that concrete entities such as rocks, stars, philosophers, and bluebells woods (all Parfit’s examples) exist. However, this view is unlikely to be true for all domains of

²⁴ As Parfit says: “numbers are not a kind of entity about which it is a clear enough question whether, in some ontological sense, they exist, or are real, though they are not in space or time” (2011b, 479).

²⁵ Someone could be a metaphysical cognitivist about different domains of discourse, but I shall limit the discussion to the normative and moral domains of discourse. I am introducing metaphysical cognitivism here, not to assess it, but to explain further Parfit’s view. Hence, what I will say about this view may sound rather sketchy.

discourse, including the normative domain. For the normative domain, Parfit will say, we should prefer to go with Non-Metaphysical Cognitivism, rather than Metaphysical Cognitivism. Hence, while metaphysical cognitivists are committed to the claims that some assertions or claims of a specific domain are true and that these true claims imply that the things they assert exist in some ontological sense, non-metaphysical cognitivists are instead committed to the two following claims (Parfit 2011b, 479):

- (i) There are some claims that are, in the strongest sense, true, but these truths have no positive ontological implications.
- (ii) When such claims assert that there are certain things, or that these things exist, these claims do not imply that these things exist in some ontological sense.

To refer, one more time, to the example of the mathematical claim “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ”, non-metaphysical cognitivists maintain that we do not have, in order to determine whether this claim is true, to answer questions regarding the existence of numbers or of mathematical relations such as “+” and “=”. The same would be true, according to Parfit, for normative claims, and this is why these claims would not imply that what they ascribe exists in an ontological sense.

To use another of Parfit’s examples (2011b, 486): if we say that Napoleon did something wrong in invading Russia, non-metaphysical cognitivists will say that Napoleon’s action of invading Russia is an event happening in the spatio-temporal world, although they will say that the wrongness of his action is not a natural property. Furthermore, they will say that the claim about the wrongness of Napoleon’s action has no ontological implication whatsoever. In order to assert that this claim is true, we do not need to add a “normative layer” to reality, a layer that would make this claim true. As Suikkanen explains, about this very idea of Parfit: “[t]he thought then is that, given the similarities between normative truths and the previous truths [i.e. mathematical truths], the normative truths do not need to be based on an independently existing

layer of reality either” (2017, 195). Thus, nothing is metaphysically needed to make normative and moral claims true.

A reason to maintain Non-Metaphysical Cognitivism is that it might make non-naturalism compatible with the scientific world view, because nothing else than the natural world would be required for normative claims to be true. Nevertheless, it seems odd or misleading to call Parfit’s view “realist”, and he himself, in his later work, wanted to resist attributing this label to his view.²⁶ As he now claims in the third volume of *On What Matters*, he prefers to name his view “Non-Realist Cognitivism”. And if Parfit is not a realist, he should not be understood as a non-naturalist realist either. Here is what he says about this issue (2017, 59):

Some other Alethic Realists are not Naturalists. These people believe that certain claims are made to be true by being correct descriptions of how things are, not in the natural world, but in some other part of reality. In their beliefs about these truths, these people are *Metaphysical Non-Naturalists*.

Some other people reject Alethic Realism. Some of these are what I earlier called *Non-Metaphysical Non-Naturalists*, and now call *Non-Realist Cognitivists*. We are Cognitivists but not Realists about some kind of claim if we believe that such claims can be true, but we deny that these claims are made to be true by correctly describing, or corresponding to, how things are in some part of reality.

And he adds (2017, 60):

Metaphysical Non-Naturalists believe that, when we make irreducibly normative claims, these claims imply that there exist some ontologically weighty non-natural entities or properties. Naturalists find such claims mysterious or incredible. Non-Realist Cognitivists deny that normative claims have any such ontological implications. On this view, normative claims are not made to be true by the way in which they correctly describe, or correspond to, how things are in some part of reality.

A few things call for explanation. First, Parfit defines “Alethic Realism” and “Naturalism about Reality” as, respectively, maintaining the following (2017, 58): “[a]ll true claims are made to be

²⁶ Street nevertheless maintains that we should consider Parfit as a realist, mainly because he believes that there are robust attitude-independent reasons (2017, 122).

true by the way in which these claims correctly describe, or correspond to, how things are in some part of reality”; “[t]he natural, spatio-temporal world is the whole of reality”.

Second, considering what Parfit says about non-realist cognitivists’ commitments, namely that all ontological truths are about natural facts, and hence that non-realist cognitivists do not need to postulate normative facts and properties, Parfit’s view collapses into the conjunction of (1) and (2) previously introduced:

(1) The core claim: there are non-natural normative truths.

(2) Minimal non-naturalism: there are non-natural normative truths, but there are no non-natural normative properties or facts; all normative properties and facts are natural.

Indeed, Parfit will most likely accept the conjunction of (1) and (2), as according to his non-realist cognitivism, normative truths do not need anything metaphysical to be made true. This is so because he believes that some normative claims are true, and that they are neither made true by natural facts nor by non-natural normative facts (this follows from his rejection of alethic realism).²⁷

1.1.2. A Robust Metaphysical Commitment

Non-naturalist realists do not maintain Parfit’s idea that normative claims, if true, have no positive ontological implication. As David Enoch says, we should say that non-naturalism

²⁷ However, it is not clear that Parfit could explain how normative claims are made true. This is exactly what Suikkanen means when he says that non-realist cognitivists “cannot make sense of the truth of normative truths”, as none of the traditional theories of truth seem to be consistent with non-realist cognitivism (Suikkanen 2017, 196). According to Suikkanen, these traditional theories of truth include correspondence, deflationism, coherentism, and pragmatism, and none of them are available to Parfit and non-realist cognitivists. For reasons I cannot pursue here, Suikkanen also argues that epistemic theories of truth do not represent an interesting option for Parfit, and that the only option available to Parfit seems to be committed to primitivism about truth. However, if Parfit does maintain primitivism, he would also have to maintain that the property of truth is a *sui generis* property most likely incompatible with the scientific world view, while one of the principal motivations of non-realist cognitivism is to introduce a view compatible with such a world view. To be clear, I do not see myself as arguing that non-realist cognitivists *cannot* explain how normative truths are made true, but merely that this view has to agree to the conjunction of (1) and (2), and that this conjunction is not very promising. The claim that non-realist cognitivists cannot explain how normative truths are made true has been convincingly argued by Suikkanen.

“wears its ontological commitment on its sleeve” (2011, 7). This is the reason why (3), properly understood, represents the *robust* version of non-naturalism:

(3) Robust non-naturalism: there are both non-natural normative truths and non-natural normative properties and facts.

Furthermore, the proper way to understand (3) is literal: maintaining that “there are non-natural normative properties and facts” means that there *are* such properties and facts, that there is a normative layer to reality. Of course, we may not be able to empirically observe normative facts and properties, but by maintaining that there normative properties and facts, non-naturalists commit themselves to the existence of such properties and facts “in the world”.

It is also possible to analyze further what is meant by (3), and more specifically by the claim that there are non-natural normative (or moral) properties and facts, by referring to how Tristram McPherson understands the core commitments of non-naturalism (2012, 207):²⁸

(4) Existence: there are instances of normative properties.

(5) Negative: normative properties are metaphysically *sui generis*.

In order to get normative facts out of (4), it seems necessary to add what Constantinescu calls “atomism”: normative facts are instantiations of normative properties (2014, 155). In this context, Constantinescu is careful to specify that normative properties are understood as being “qualities which individuals can instantiate (as opposed to being just sets of individuals, for instance), and which, while ‘resulting from,’ ‘being realised by,’ or ‘being constituted by’ natural properties, are nevertheless neither identical nor reducible to natural properties” (2014, 155–56).²⁹ Saying that normative properties are qualities which individuals (and most likely not only

²⁸ (4) and (5) roughly explain what is meant by (3) and by the idea that there are non-natural normative properties and facts. Again, for the sake of consistency, I have changed McPherson’s use of the vocabulary of “ethical properties” to “normative properties”.

²⁹ Constantinescu is rather quick in his description of non-naturalism. Indeed, it is far from being obvious that non-naturalists must maintain that normative properties are either “resulting from”, “being realized by”, or “being

individuals) can instantiate is a stronger metaphysical commitment than the metaphysical commitment of minimal non-naturalism. Indeed, by believing that there are normative properties, non-naturalists also believe that there are some instances in the world of these properties. Moreover, saying that normative properties are *sui generis* specifies further what is meant by the claim that they are non-natural.

From now on, I will refer, unless specified otherwise, to non-naturalists as being committed to (1), (4), and (5). Furthermore, we should resist the temptation to argue that non-naturalists are *necessarily* committed to more than that. To be clear, non-naturalists *may* be committed to more than (1), (4), and (5); but I think it would be unmotivated to say that they are necessarily committed to more than that. More specifically, the claim I have in mind here concerns supervenience, and whether we should add supervenience as being one of the core theoretical commitments of non-naturalism. This is the side Constantinescu takes, when he is understanding non-naturalism as the conjunction of all of the following claims (I have already referred to some of them) (2014, 155):³⁰

Cognitivism: normative sentences express beliefs and are therefore truth-apt.

Correspondence: normative sentences are true when they correspond to normative facts.

Atomism: normative facts are instantiations of normative properties.

Objectivism: normative facts and properties are mind-independent.

Supervenience: normative facts and properties supervene upon natural facts and properties.

constituted by” natural properties (although each of these options have received some support from non-naturalists). More importantly, it is not clear that these options are consistent with non-naturalists’ core thesis that normative truths are not made true, exclusively, by natural truths. The fact that normative facts are instantiations of normative properties is thoroughly consistent with (1), but the fact that – for instance – normative properties are realized by natural properties may not be. An explanation of how normative properties are instantiated is welcomed, if not required, but non-naturalists do not have to accept one of the options advanced by Constantinescu.

³⁰ To be fair, it is the side almost everybody (including non-naturalists) takes when they discuss non-naturalism.

Non-reductivism: normative facts and properties are metaphysically *sui generis*.³¹

Rationalism: normative facts are intrinsically reason-giving.

I believe most of these claims would be – implicitly or explicitly – maintained by non-naturalists (and some of them may just be synonymous with either (1), (4) or (5)), but considering that one of the goals of this thesis is to assess whether non-naturalists should maintain “supervenience”, we shall not assume that they *must* maintain it.³² This is true even if, and perhaps for good reasons, non-naturalists do maintain “supervenience”. Hence, we should leave room for a metaethicist to be a non-naturalist while denying supervenience (i.e. to maintain (1), (4) and (5)) while denying supervenience). For this very reason, I will not consider supervenience as being a core theoretical commitment of non-naturalism, although it will be later postulated as being maintained by non-naturalists.

Before moving on to the next section, one thing still requires further explanation, and that is what non-naturalists mean when they say that normative properties are metaphysically *sui generis*. Trying to make that clear is the topic of the next section.

1.1.3. Sui generis Normative Properties

As stated by Chris Heathwood, “[a]ccording to normative non-reductionism, there are normative properties and facts [...] and these facts are *sui generis*: that is, they are not identical to any facts that we can express or adequately understand using terms from some other domain” (2015, 217). Considering Heathwood is talking about all normative non-reductionists, it seems like the claim

³¹ “Non-reductivism” might not be the best expression to use here, since it might suggest that non-reductionist naturalists believe that “normative facts and properties are metaphysically *sui generis*”. However, if “metaphysically *sui generis*” is understood as I think it should be (see section 1.1.3), non-reductionist naturalists do not support “non-reductivism”.

³² To be clear, Constantinescu is not claiming that non-naturalists *must* maintain all these claims; his point is rather descriptive. Also, it is correct to say that an important majority of non-naturalists do maintain supervenience.

that normative properties and facts are *sui generis* is a claim that non-reductionist naturalists could also maintain. This is so mainly because what “some other domain” refers to is not specified by Heathwood.³³ But, if, on his behalf, we say that this other domain is the *natural* domain (and assuming we have a clear understanding of what “natural” refers to), we may have a definition of the notion of a *sui generis* property that only non-naturalists would maintain. Here is a quote from McPherson that supports what I just expressed (2012, 209; emphases in the original):

While goodness on the Boydian account cannot be reduced to any other property, it is not *sui generis*. Rather, it is *metaphysically continuous* with other classes of natural properties, because its nature is to be understood in terms (natural kinds, causation, homeostatic feedback, etc.) that are themselves deeply naturalistic. Non-naturalism as I will understand it rules out this sort of continuity between ethical and non-ethical properties.

As I understand McPherson, the property *x* will be metaphysically continuous with the property *y* if the terms that are used to understand the nature of *y* are or can be used to understand the nature of *x*. Thus, *x* will be metaphysically *discontinuous* with *y* if the terms used to understand the nature of *y* are not and cannot be used to understand the nature of *x*. For example, let us assume that “causation” is a “deeply naturalistic”³⁴ term, that it is the only deeply naturalistic term, and that *y*’s nature is to be understood in terms of causal powers or causal relations; *x* will be metaphysically continuous with *y* if *x*’s nature is also to be understood in terms of causal powers or causal relations, and *x* will be metaphysically *discontinuous* with *y* if *x*’s nature is *not* to be understood in terms of causal powers or causal relations.³⁵ In other words, for *x* to be

³³ How “adequately understand” is defined is also important. Indeed, non-reductionist naturalists could agree that normative facts cannot be adequately understood using terms from some other domain, mainly because normative facts cannot be reduced to non-normative facts. However, it is important to note that non-reductionist naturalists are still trying to understand normative facts in natural terms, something that non-naturalists are repudiating.

³⁴ What distinguishes a “deeply naturalistic” term from a mere naturalistic term is unfortunately not explained by McPherson.

³⁵ It is important to note that this is only an example, and that it could end up being inaccurate if causation is not a deeply naturalistic term. Furthermore, it could be the case that causation is not a deeply naturalistic term, if – for instance – dualist views of the mental are true. According to these views, the mental is *sui generis* but nevertheless

metaphysically discontinuous with y , x 's nature cannot be understood in the terms in which y 's nature is. This is, as should be made clear in the next section, a good representation of what non-naturalists have in mind when they say that normative properties are *sui generis*: normative properties cannot be understood in the terms in which non-normative properties are understood.

Moreover, it is also important to emphasize that non-naturalists believe that normative properties are also discontinuous with supernatural properties (or with *other* supernatural properties, considering we may think that everything that is not natural is supernatural). This is made clear by Pekka Väyrynen, when he says that “the non-naturalist thinks that at least some normative properties aren’t identical to any natural or supernatural properties, nor do they have a real definition, metaphysical reduction, or any other such tight metaphysical explanation wholly in terms of natural or supernatural properties” (2017, 171). Hence, in order to reveal (5)’s meaning, we need to focus on this idea of normative properties as being discontinuous with non-normative properties by understanding “non-normative properties” as referring to both natural and supernatural properties. Thus, maintaining that normative properties are *sui generis* means that these properties cannot be understood in terms that are either “deeply naturalistic” or “deeply supernaturalistic”.

causal. If dualism about the mental is true, it would mean that causation is not a deeply naturalistic term. Even within the normative non-naturalism family, some believe that normative properties can be *sui generis* and causal (Oddie 2005; Wedgwood 2007).

1.2. Why Believe in Non-naturalism?

In this section, I will introduce a few reasons to take non-naturalism seriously, reasons that will – hopefully – represent some points of plausibility for non-naturalism. Importantly, many of these reasons are not conclusive reasons to believe in non-naturalism, and what follows should be understood as an “argument by accumulation”. Indeed, it is because we have *many* (non-conclusive) reasons to believe in non-naturalism that we should take this view seriously, not because we have one conclusive reason to believe in it. I also propose to follow an argumentative strategy that is best understood as being constituted of two steps, that also correspond to the main motivations to believe in non-naturalism in the first place. The first step consists in maintaining that there are some reasons to believe that normative properties cannot be reduced to non-normative properties (something that non-reductionist naturalists could also maintain). The second consists in maintaining that there are some reasons to believe that normative properties have features that natural properties cannot or do not have, that they are metaphysically *sui generis* and discontinuous with natural properties (something that non-reductionist naturalists could not maintain).

Hence, I see non-naturalism as being motivated by two main points: first, normativity cannot be reduced to what is non-normative; second, normativity is somehow different from the non-normative and the natural. These two points are often intertwined in non-naturalists’ works, and the first is not always properly differentiated from the second. For instance, David Enoch says that the main reason that motivates non-naturalism seems to be that, at least to non-naturalists’ eyes, normative properties are radically different than any other kinds of properties.

This is what he calls the “just-too-different” intuition. As he explains himself: “Robust Realism³⁶ rejects the naturalist claim that – in a sense yet to be precisified – normative facts are nothing over and above natural ones. Normative facts are just too different from natural ones to be a subset thereof” (2011, 4). The main point that Enoch derives from this just-too-different intuition is that a *reduction* of normative facts to natural facts would have important counterintuitive consequences (Enoch 2011, 106).³⁷ And if a reduction of moral facts to natural facts has important counterintuitive consequences, we should rather believe that moral facts cannot be reduced to natural facts. However, for Enoch, this also suggests that normative properties are *sui generis*, but his reason to believe so seems to be, as I said, importantly intertwined with his reason to believe that normative properties cannot be reduced to non-normative properties.

Importantly, only if this second step could be maintained successfully – something that assumes that the first step has already been convincingly maintained – will we have an argument for normative non-naturalism. Indeed, the first step by itself cannot represent a reason to believe in non-naturalism. Nevertheless, as a commitment to non-reductionism is also an important part of the reasons why many philosophers believe in non-naturalism, I consider important to introduce some reasons to believe in normative non-reductionism.

³⁶ By “Robust Realism,” Enoch means roughly the same thing as I mean by “non-naturalism”.

³⁷ If it is the case that normative facts are just-too-different from natural facts to be a subset of them, we could then say that any attempt to reduce normative facts to natural facts will (or should) be unsuccessful.

1.2.1. Against a Reduction of Normative Facts

Michael Huemer introduces the following argument to maintain that normative³⁸ properties are not reducible to natural properties (2005, 94):³⁹

- (i) Normative properties are radically different from natural properties.
- (ii) If two things are radically different, then one is not reducible to the other.
- (iii) So normative properties are not reducible to natural properties.

To sustain (i), Huemer says the following: “[o]n the face of it, for example, *wrongness* seems to be a completely different *kind* of property from, say, *weighing 5 pounds*” (Huemer 2005, 94; emphases in the original). For Huemer, the normative is radically different from the natural. Saying otherwise would be to commit something like a category mistake, and it seems to be something like that that Huemer has in mind. As he says himself: “[...] if good seems to us to refer to something of a fundamentally different category from natural properties, then when we say ‘good’ we are not talking about a natural property” (2005, 95). And because *goodness* – just like *wrongness* – seems to be completely different than natural properties and to refer to something radically different than natural properties like *weighing 5 pounds* or *being the planet Neptune*, normative properties cannot be reduced to natural properties.⁴⁰

³⁸ Huemer prefers to use the language of “value properties” rather than “normative properties”. To ease the discussion, I have replaced each occurrence, in his argument, of the former expression by the latter.

³⁹ It is important to note that Huemer’s argument seems to presume that normative properties are radically different from natural properties. I do not find Huemer’s support of this claim very convincing, but I shall say later in this section a few things that may provide better support for it.

⁴⁰ Importantly, this is a rather weak argument, as how things appear to be is dependent on many things, including our best scientific theories. For instance, “having a mass” and “having a weight” could appear to be quite different things under some theories, or at some time of the history, even if we could now agree that they are both natural properties. Furthermore, the claim that normative properties are radically different from natural properties may appear to be true under some understanding of what is natural (i.e. “the physical”), but this may only be because we have a very narrow understanding and definition of the natural. If, for instance, we follow FitzPatrick in maintaining that there is more to the natural than what scientific inquiry reveals to us, then we could have a good reason to deny that normative properties are *radically* different from natural properties (FitzPatrick forthcoming, 9).

Another reason to believe that normative facts cannot be reduced to natural facts comes from Parfit's *triviality objection*.⁴¹ According to this objection, if normative facts would be reducible to natural facts, then we would have to agree that substantive normative claims are trivial despite that they do not appear to be so. For Parfit, normative claims would be substantive if they are "significant", in the sense that we can disagree about them, or that they can give us new information (Parfit 2011b, 343). A significant normative claim would also be positive if this claim states that something has a normative property if this thing has certain natural properties (Parfit 2011b, 343). When a normative claim is true, for Parfit, this claim states a positive substantive fact. However, if reductionist naturalists were to be right, and utilitarianism were the correct first-order moral theory, the following two claims would be equivalent:

- (i) When some act would maximize happiness, this act is what we ought to do.
- (ii) When some act would maximize happiness, this property of this act is the same as the property of being what we ought to do.

According to Parfit, we should consider (i) as a substantive positive moral claim; but, if (ii) is true, (i) could not be a positive substantive moral claim. This is so because, if (ii) is true, (i) cannot state that the property "being what we ought to do" is different from the property "maximizing happiness". Hence, if reductionist naturalists were to be right, (i) would be trivial, because (i) would not give us any new information not given by (ii). But, at least according to Parfit, (i) is not a trivial claim (Parfit 2011b, 344). Thus, (ii) cannot be true, and this suggests that reductionist naturalism cannot be true either, that the normative is not reducible to the non-normative or to the natural.

⁴¹ Even if Parfit is not a non-naturalist as I have defined this metaethical view, he still says many things that support non-naturalism. Parfit's triviality objection is first and foremost against non-analytic naturalism, a view according to which normative truths are not irreducible but normative terms and claims are irreducible (Parfit 2011b, 263). Nevertheless, because non-analytic naturalists believe that normative truths are reducible to natural (or to non-normative) truths, I consider that Parfit's objection can be recast as an objection against reductionism.

1.2.2. Normative Force and Categorical Reasons

Huemer's and Parfit's arguments may show that normative properties cannot be reduced to natural properties, but they do not show yet that normative properties are metaphysically *sui generis*. According to Enoch, the main reason that supports the claim that normative properties are *sui generis* is that "[n]o natural fact by itself can have normative force" (2011, 108). Enoch gives the following example to maintain the last claim (Enoch 2011, 107–8): let us imagine an agent wondering what she should do in a given context and, in order to help this agent, we tell her that pressing the blue button will maximize utility. For Enoch, saying that pressing the blue button will maximize utility – a natural fact – is a non-starter as an answer to the agent's question "what should⁴² I do?" It is a non-starter because it fails to meet what is motivating the question; or, when it does not fail to meet what is motivating the question, it is because there are some assumptions already taken for granted.

As claimed by Enoch, if we assume that utilitarianism is correct, and hence that we should always maximize utility, then "pressing the blue button will maximize utility" would be a satisfactory answer to the question "what should I do?" But this specific background assumption is itself a normative or moral commitment, and most likely something like a paradigmatic normative or moral fact (if it is indeed the case that utilitarianism is correct). This is the reason why a natural fact *by itself* has no normative force. In order to maintain that the answer "pressing the blue button will maximize utility" has any kind of normative force, it is necessary to take a normative commitment as being already assumed. Because normative facts can answer the question "what should I do?", while natural (and non-normative) facts cannot, normative facts are just too different from natural facts to count as natural themselves.

⁴² I assume here that "should" is used in a normative context.

Another claim, close to the previous one, is that only normative facts can give *categorical* reasons to act, something that natural facts cannot give. For example, let us presuppose that I am a huge poutine enthusiast and that I am also a strict vegan. The fact that the cafeteria of my university is serving vegan poutine for lunch gives me a reason to go to the cafeteria.⁴³ However, this reason will be hypothetical rather than categorical, because I have this reason insofar as I am a huge poutine enthusiast and a strict vegan. If, for whatever reason, I stop being a poutine enthusiast and become averse to this meal once looking so delicious to me, the fact that the cafeteria of my university is serving vegan poutine for lunch will no longer give me a reason to go to the cafeteria.⁴⁴ In other words, this reason to go to the cafeteria for lunch is not categorical in the sense that its application to me depends on some substantive facts about myself.

However, things seem to be different when we are talking about normativity and morality. If we assume that it is a fact that it is wrong to kick a dog for the fun of it, then this fact will give me a reason not to do something – not to kick a dog for the fun of it – no matter what I desire to do or believe I should do. I may mistakenly believe that it is morally permissible to kick a dog for the fun of it (this false moral belief may be based on a false empirical belief, for example that dogs do not feel pain), and hence I may not realize that I have a reason not to kick this dog in front of me. Nevertheless, it would be true that I have a reason not to do it; this is why the moral fact that it is wrong to kick a dog for the fun of it would be a categorical reason.

For non-naturalists, only normative facts can represent categorical reasons for action; no matter how complex or crucial they could be, natural facts cannot have this kind of force all by themselves. If this is correct, then we may have a reason to believe that normative facts are *sui*

⁴³ For this fact to give me a reason to act, it might also be necessary to hold other assumptions as being true, like “I have enough money in my bank account to pay for this meal”, “I did not bring a lunch today”, etc.

⁴⁴ I could nevertheless have a reason to go to the cafeteria for lunch, but this reason would be provided by another fact.

generis, and thus that non-naturalism is onto something important in metanormativity and metaethics. To recapitulate, the non-naturalists' strategy so far consists in arguing for the following: because only normative facts can answer the question "what should I do?", and because only normative facts can represent categorical reasons for action, then we have a reason to believe that normative facts are metaphysically discontinuous with non-normative facts. Rightly, non-reductionist naturalists will most likely respond that these points only show that reductionism about normative facts cannot be right, not that non-reductionist naturalism cannot be right; and hence that the non-naturalists' strategy would fail to ground their view. But at this stage of the argument, we nevertheless have a reason to believe – although not a conclusive one – that non-naturalists are onto something, and that normative facts and properties may be *sui generis*. Indeed, the arguments introduced in the previous paragraphs aim at showing that normative facts and properties are different from natural facts and properties *tout court*, not that normative facts and properties are a different kind of natural fact and property (as non-reductionist naturalists argue). So, unless the non-naturalists' arguments are proven wrong, they do in fact support their view, and they work towards establishing the truth of non-naturalism not of non-reductionism about normativity.

Non-naturalists could also add the idea that, among the realist options, it is the best option to secure the normativity of normative facts. More specifically, the idea, here, is that at least some facts cannot be rendered in non-normative terms. Hence, even if non-naturalists grant that facts such as "this action having the natural property *P* is the reason why this action is wrong" could be reduced to a natural fact, the "metafact" that "this action being wrong is the reason why this action merits a reaction of disapproval" could not be reduced to a natural fact. Here, non-naturalists could either maintain that no natural fact could constitute this normative "metafact" or

that it is not possible to reduce this “metafact” to a natural fact without losing its normativity (Dancy 2006, 136–38; FitzPatrick 2008, 185, 2009, 750–51).

About the former option, William FitzPatrick argues that a natural fact *might* explain why an action is wrong, but that is not equivalent to providing an explanation of why this action would merit a reaction of disapproval (or any other kind of practical reaction). This is a further fact about the fact that an action is wrong; hence the expression “metafact”. And this metafact is *intrinsically* normative: it says that an action having a given feature – in this case, being wrong – makes it merit a practical reaction – in this case, disapproval. For FitzPatrick, no natural fact could capture this very idea of meriting such a practical reaction.⁴⁵

About the latter option, Jonathan Dancy says that there are some normative metafacts that cannot be natural facts, or that there are some normative metafacts that have features that natural facts cannot have. As he says about these normative metafacts: “[t]hese metafacts are facts about some matter of fact and about its making a difference to how to act. They constitute direct answers not only to the practical question what to do, but also to the question why” (Dancy 2006, 137). Natural facts could be facts of normative *significance*, but facts about which facts are of normative significance are not natural facts (Dancy 2006, 139). Maintaining otherwise would mean that we abolish the normativity of these metafacts, in the sense that we would have to change the subject between something that has normative significance and *why* this thing has normative significance (Dancy 2006, 140). Both for FitzPatrick and for Dancy, the reasoning here is that, unless naturalists could convince us that such normative metafacts could be

⁴⁵ To be fair, it is important to note that, at this stage of his argument, FitzPatrick has already argued that metaethical views such as stance-dependent naturalistic views according to which “moral wrongness is a natural property that merits such practical reactions from us insofar as we *would* disapprove of or deliberately dismiss actions with that property if we were fully informed, instrumentally rational, etc.” should be resisted (FitzPatrick 2008, 185). It would lead us too far afield to introduce how FitzPatrick gets to that conclusion.

explained as natural facts without losing their normativity, we should rather believe in non-naturalism.

If we add all these reasons together – that normative facts seem just-too-different than natural facts, that it seems unlikely that we could reduce normative facts to natural facts, that only normative facts could answer questions such as “what should I do?”, that only normative facts seem to give us categorical reasons to act, that some normative facts cannot be rendered in natural terms – we have some reasons to take non-naturalism seriously.⁴⁶

1.3. Issues with Non-naturalism

In this section, I will offer a brief survey of the main issues and problems non-naturalists are facing. These issues can be divided into two broad categories: epistemological and metaphysical. The epistemological issues with non-naturalism are important and they have received extended attention in the literature, and even if they are not the main topic here, it is important to note that non-naturalists are not only facing metaphysical issues. I will briefly introduce what I consider as being the main epistemological issue with non-naturalism in section 1.3.1, and in section 1.3.2 I will introduce a classic metaphysical problem about non-naturalism: non-natural normative properties are metaphysically too queer to be real. This last issue, first introduced by Mackie

⁴⁶ The issue might not be as sharply defined as I am presenting it. Indeed, some metaethicists may say that normative properties (and facts) are in some respects discontinuous with natural properties, while being continuous with them in some other respects. For instance, someone could argue that normative properties are causal, even if only normative facts (and not natural facts) could answer the question “what should I do?” I do not see any problem with this kind of position. If a realist still believes that causal terms are intrinsically natural, then she would be arguing for a form of naturalism in metaethics, and this even if she believes that normative properties are irreducible to (other) natural properties. If she believes that causal terms are not intrinsically natural, then she might after all be arguing for non-naturalism. Indeed, most non-naturalists argue that normative properties are not causal because they also believe that causality is a natural feature, and that having this feature makes a property natural. If it could be argued that causality is not a feature unique to the natural, or, in other terms, that causal terms are not intrinsically natural, then non-naturalists could agree that normative properties are causal.

(1977), will make the transition between this introductory chapter and the next chapter on the supervenience of normative properties upon non-normative properties

1.3.1. Non-naturalism, Causality and Evolution

Non-naturalists seem to agree that normative facts, normative properties, or normative truths are not causally efficacious, that is to say that they are causally inert. It is not always clear why non-naturalists are committed to this view, but we can at least point to two reasons why it is understandable that non-naturalists believe that normative entities⁴⁷ are causally inert.

First, if you believe that normative properties are *sui generis*, and hence cannot be understood in terms that are deeply naturalistic, and if you believe that causal terms are deeply naturalistic, then you have a reason to believe that normative properties are causally inert. This reason to believe that normative properties are causally inert relies on an assumption that some may not accept, namely that causal terms are deeply naturalistic. However, such an assumption seems to be understood as being correct or true by most non-naturalists.⁴⁸ Shafer-Landau, doubting that normative properties could be causally efficacious, prefers to reject any kind of causal test to determine whether normative properties exist (2003, 98–114). Indeed, according to him, we do not believe in normative properties because of the causal role we expect them to play, but for other reasons such as allowing us to evaluate and guide our actions and behaviours.

Second, and this reason is also somehow intertwined with the first, if you are strongly confident in the just-too-different intuition, as Enoch is, you may believe that the normative would not share any intrinsic features of the natural. So, even if causal terms might not be deeply

⁴⁷ To ease the discussion, I will mainly talk about normative properties as being either causally efficacious or causally inert.

⁴⁸ Oddie (2005) and Wedgwood (2007) seem to be the most notable exceptions.

naturalistic, it seems uncontroversial to affirm that the natural is causal (or at least to affirm the weaker claim that most of the natural is causal). And if you really believe that the normative is just-too-different than the natural, then you might be ready to maintain that there is no way the normative can be causal, that believing that the normative is causal would make the normative too close to the natural. This reason could hold even if causal terms are not *deeply* naturalistic. However, it is important to note that it raises the question whether the just-too-different intuition is clear and strong enough to get us to this conclusion if causal terms are not deeply naturalistic.

Now, if non-naturalists do in fact maintain that normative properties are causally inert, then they may have trouble explaining how we could come to know these normative properties, or, maybe more accurately, how we could come to know the normative truths. As Enoch explains, non-naturalists are committed to the idea that, at least most of the time, when we believe a specific normative judgment to be true, this judgment is also true (2011, 159). Hence, there is a correlation between normative truths and our normative judgments, in the sense that it looks unlikely, at least to non-naturalists' eyes, that all of our normative judgments are false. Some of them could be false, and we might sometimes fail to believe the truth; but believing that we always fail to believe the truth does not seem compatible with non-naturalists' optimism that we could – most of the time – know the normative truths.

The question, now, is “what explains this correlation?” Such a correlation between the normative truths and our normative judgments cannot be brute or unexplainable. For sure, if there exists such a correlation, we should be able to provide an explanation of it. And the question “what explains this correlation?” becomes even more salient if we take into consideration the fact that it cannot be explained in causal terms. As most non-naturalists believe that normative truths are causally inert, non-naturalists seem to be in a tough position regarding

the kind of explanation they could provide of the correlation between normative truths and our normative beliefs and judgments.

To illustrate this point, it is worthwhile comparing how other normative realists could answer such an epistemological challenge. For the sake of the argument, let us assume that reductionism is roughly correct, and that the following reduction is right: maximizing utility *is* moral rightness. Maximizing utility is, in this context, a natural property, and the normative property moral rightness is reduced to it (and let us assume that moral rightness is reduced to only one natural property). If this holds, then the correlation between the normative truths (at least the normative truths about rightness) and our normative judgments could be explained with relative ease. Indeed, in all likelihood, maximizing utility is a natural property of states of affairs with which we could be in causal relationships, and by being in causal relationships with the natural property of maximizing utility we would also be in causal relationships with the normative property of moral rightness. This may not be enough to explain how we could get to know moral rightness, but it is at least something that looks like the beginning of a promising epistemological story.

We may however believe that this explanation of the correlation between normative truths and our normative judgments is wrong-headed, and we may believe, as Scanlon does, that we should not think of normative facts in terms of facts that could have “a causal impact on our sensory surfaces” (Scanlon 2014, 70). However, this is beside the actual point. The issue here is rather that reductionists do have, although it may be incomplete so far, an explanation of this correlation, while it is dubious that non-naturalists could come up with such an explanation. As Enoch states (2011, 159):

What explains this correlation? On a robustly realist view of normativity, it can't be that our normative judgments are causally or constitutively responsible for the normative truths, because the normative truths are supposed to be independent of our normative judgments. And given that (at least basic) normative truths are causally inert, they are not causally responsible for our normative beliefs. Nor does there seem to be some third-factor explanation available to the robust realist.⁴⁹ And so the robust realist is committed to an unexplained striking correlation, and this may just be too much to believe.

It is mainly because non-naturalists seem to be committed to an unexplained correlation, while this seems not to be the case for other metaethicists, that this conclusion is so problematic. One specific version of this epistemological challenge that has received a lot of attention in the literature is Sharon Street's Darwinian Dilemma (2006).⁵⁰ Before moving on to metaphysical issues, it might be valuable to say a few words about Street's understanding of the epistemological issues with non-naturalism.

According to Street, our normative judgments have been shaped to a large extent by evolutionary forces and pressures. As she states herself (2006, 121):

[T]he content of human evaluative judgements has been tremendously influenced – indirectly influenced, in the way I have indicated, but nevertheless tremendously influenced – by the forces of natural selection, such that our system of evaluative judgements is saturated with evolutionary influence.

To explain further, by the idea that the content of our normative (or evaluative) judgments has been indirectly influenced by the forces of natural selection, she means that natural selection pressures have had a direct influence on our basic evaluative tendencies, which themselves have had a more direct influence on the evaluative judgments we now are inclined to make (Street 2006, 119–20). The point here is that there is, again, a relation that calls for an explanation. This time, it is the relation between the independent⁵¹ normative truths that non-naturalists believe exist and the influence of the evolutionary forces on our normative judgments. Street's problem

⁴⁹ It is important to note that Enoch does not assent to this conclusion. Indeed, in *Taking Morality Seriously*, he develops a third-factor explanation to explain the correlation between moral facts and moral beliefs (2011, 168–75).

⁵⁰ A similar argument can be found in Joyce (2006, chapter 6).

⁵¹ "Independent" in the sense of "independent of our attitudes" or "attitude-independent".

is a dilemma because non-naturalists could take two different paths, both of which are problematic.

First, non-naturalists could deny that there is a relation between the independent normative truths and the selective forces that have shaped our normative judgments, but this option does not appear very promising for non-naturalists. Indeed, it would be something like a miracle if our normative judgments, saturated with evolutionary influence, would “hit” the normative truths; and in all likelihood we should rather maintain the skeptical conclusion according to which our normative judgments are mostly off track regarding the truth (Street 2006, 122). Indeed, if most of our normative judgments do in fact correspond to the normative truths, this would be the result of pure coincidence. However, considering – at least conceptually – that the content of our normative judgments could have been radically different than they are now, saying that the normative judgments we do in fact have correspond to the independent normative truths seems to be something non-naturalists could not seriously say.

The second option available to non-naturalists would be to maintain that there is a correlation between the normative truths and our normative judgments shaped by the forces of evolution. For Street, if non-naturalists take this option, then they have to argue for the “tracking account”. Street understands this account as maintaining the following (2006, 126):

According to this hypothesis, our ability to recognize evaluative truths [...] conferred upon us certain advantages that helped us to flourish and reproduce. Thus, the forces of natural selection that influenced the shape of so many of our evaluative judgements need not and should not be viewed as distorting or illegitimate at all. For the evaluative judgements that it proved most selectively advantageous to make are, in general, precisely those evaluative judgements which are true.

The problem with the tracking account, and for reasons I will not go into, is that it looks scientifically suspicious and that it will lose the “battle of the best explanation”. Indeed, according to Street, the “adaptive link account” is by far superior to the tracking account as an

explanation of why we make the normative judgments we do. Here is how Street summarizes this adaptive link account (2006, 127):

According to what I will call the adaptive link account, tendencies to make certain kinds of evaluative judgements rather than others contributed to our ancestors' reproductive success not because they constituted perceptions of independent evaluative truths, but rather because they forged adaptive links between our ancestors' circumstances and their responses to those circumstances, getting them to act, feel, and believe in ways that turned out to be reproductively advantageous.

Hence, Street's point is not necessarily that non-naturalists have no explanation of the relation between the forces of evolution on our normative judgments and the normative truths, but that other explanations are better than non-naturalists' explanation. And mainly because of that, we should not maintain non-naturalism (or any other kind of realist view) to explain normativity, but rather antirealism.⁵² Many realists, and non-naturalists more specifically, have replied to Street's Darwinian Dilemma (Copp 2008; Enoch 2010, 2011; FitzPatrick 2015; Shafer-Landau 2012; Skarsaune 2010; Wielenberg 2010). However, the point of the present discussion is not to evaluate the details of non-naturalists' replies to Street's Darwinian Dilemma, but rather to point out that, even if non-naturalists manage to deal with all the metaphysical issues, they still have to deal with important epistemological ones.⁵³

⁵² Street's preferred antirealist view is "Humean Constructivism" (2008, 2010, 2016).

⁵³ Although Street's Darwinian Dilemma primarily targets non-naturalism, she also believes that it applies to other forms of normative realism. For more on how it applies to naturalism, see Street (2006, section 7). If the Darwinian Dilemma does apply equally well to other sorts of normative realism, it might be argued that it does not raise special problems for non-naturalists. For instance, some realists who are not non-naturalists as this view is understood here, such as Parfit and Scanlon, also run into difficulties. Scanlon's solution that appeals to an epistemological view according to which our normative judgments are true when they stand in a relation of "reflective equilibrium", does run into difficulties because it seems dubious that he can say for sure that considered judgments about normative truths (or about reasons) are on the right track. For more on Scanlon's solution, see his *Being Realistic about Reasons* (2014, lecture 4). Parfit argues that human beings have been selected, through evolution, for their rationality and their capacity to recognize normative truths, among other truths (2011b, 494). As he claims (2011b, 497): "[N]atural selection might explain how, without any such causal contact, our ancestors became able to respond to such reasons, because that enabled them to form many true beliefs about the world, some of which helped them to survive and reproduce". However, such a response requires that there is a link between the evolutionary forces and the normative truths, something that is far from being obvious and that should be argued rather than assumed.

1.3.2. Normative Properties: Too Queer to Be Real?

John Leslie Mackie, an “Error Theorist”, is well known for having argued that “objective values”, if they exist as non-naturalists (or “intuitionists”, to use Mackie’s term) understand them, would be queer (1977). Mackie’s “argument from queerness” has two parts: one metaphysical and the other epistemological. This latter part of the argument says that non-naturalists are committed to a strange intellectual faculty: the faculty of moral intuition. This is so because we would need to postulate a new intellectual faculty to explain how we could get to know entities that would be “utterly different from anything else in the universe” (Mackie 1977, 38) This faculty would be strange or queer because it would have to be different than all our other intellectual faculties, and the account of how we could get to know these objective values would also have to be different than all the accounts we have to explain all our other true beliefs (sensory perception, introspection, conceptual analysis, etc.) (Mackie 1977, 38–39). For Mackie, because non-naturalists have to maintain a strange intellectual faculty to explain how we could know normative properties, we have an epistemological reason to reject non-naturalism.

It is dubious that non-naturalists really need to posit such a strange intellectual faculty, as Mackie seems to think. Nevertheless, the epistemological part of the argument of queerness has been very influential in the metaethical debates about moral realism; and the fact that non-naturalists do not want to be accused of postulating a queer intellectual faculty might explain why they spend so much time trying to explain how we can know normative truths, how our normative beliefs can be epistemically justified, etc. (Enoch 2011, chapter 7; Shafer-Landau 2003, chapter 12; Wielenberg 2014, chapter 4).

According to the metaphysical part of the argument from queerness, normative properties would be queer because they would need to be intrinsically prescriptive entities. Here is how Mackie summarizes his point (1977, 40):

An objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not because of any contingent fact that this person, or every person, is so constituted that he desires this end, but just because the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it. Similarly, if there were objective principles of right and wrong, any wrong (possible) course of action would have not-to-be-doneness somehow built into it.

This might not be perfectly clear in this last quote, and Mackie himself may not have expressed this point clearly, but the main problem with normative entities as non-naturalists understand them is that they would need to be objectively prescriptive. Moreover, the best understanding of the claim that normative entities would need to be objectively prescriptive is that these entities entail either categorical reasons or irreducibly normative reasons (Olson 2014, 117). This would be a reason to believe that normative entities are queer because nothing else in the world other than the normative seems to entail categorical reasons. In a sense, error theorists agree with non-naturalists about the “just-too-different” intuition, although for error theorists the idea that normative entities are radically different than everything else in the world should force us to conclude that they cannot be real. For error theorists such as Mackie, Richard Joyce (2001), and Jonas Olson, it is not only that nothing else in the world other than the normative entails categorical reasons, but also that non-naturalists do not have a proper explanation of why this is so. In other words, they believe that non-naturalists do not have a good explanation of why we should believe in what Olson calls the *conceptual claim*: moral facts are or entail categorical reasons (Olson 2014, 124). Unfortunately, it would lead us too far afield to go deeper in this debate; and the point of the present discussion is not to explain how non-naturalists could justify

their commitments to rationalism, namely the claim that moral facts are intrinsically reason-giving.⁵⁴

There is also another facet to the metaphysical part of the argument from queerness, which will concern us from now on. Mackie raises a legitimate question about the relation between normative or moral qualities and natural features in the following terms (1977, 41; emphasis in the original):

What is the connection between the natural fact that an action is a piece of deliberate cruelty – say, causing pain just for fun – and the moral fact that it is wrong?⁵⁵ It cannot be an entailment, a logical or semantic necessity. Yet it is not merely that the two features occur together. The wrongness must somehow be ‘consequential’ or ‘supervenient’; it is wrong because it is a piece of deliberate cruelty. But just what *in the world* is signified by this ‘because’?

On the face of it, it looks like non-naturalists have to agree with Mackie: an action has some moral (or normative) quality *because* it has some natural quality. But, as Mackie rightly points out, this calls for an explanation: it is not sufficient to postulate this relation of consequence⁵⁶ or supervenience, and then move on to another topic. This relation, whatever its nature, must be explained. However, according to many critics of non-naturalism, the defenders of this view cannot provide a proper understanding of this relation, and this constitutes a reason – among others – to believe that non-naturalism is false. This is what I shall call the “problem of supervenience,” and the aim of the next chapter is to explain how this problem should be best understood.

⁵⁴ For a defence of rationalism, see Shafer-Landau (2003, chapter 8).

⁵⁵ It is important to note that it is far from being obvious that “deliberate cruelty” is a natural property, but I am following Mackie here and assuming that it is indeed a natural property.

⁵⁶ It is not clear what Mackie means by this relation of consequence, although it might be close to what Dancy says about resultance (Dancy 1981, 367–73). I will say more on this in the fourth chapter.

Chapter 2: The Problem of Supervenience

Let us begin this chapter by recalling Mackie's quotation that ends the previous chapter (1977, 41; emphasis in the original):

What is the connection between the natural fact that an action is a piece of deliberate cruelty – say, causing pain just for fun – and the moral fact that it is wrong? It cannot be an entailment, a logical or semantic necessity. Yet it is not merely that the two features occur together. The wrongness must somehow be 'consequential' or 'supervenient'; it is wrong because it is a piece of deliberate cruelty. But just what *in the world* is signified by this 'because'?

This idea, noted by Mackie, that the natural and the moral are connected and occur together, seems to be something essential to our moral – and more broadly, our normative – thinking. This does not mean that we necessarily have to believe that moral properties are consequential or supervenient, or that supervenience is one of non-naturalists' core commitments, but that there are some grounds to believe such a claim. For instance, it would be quite odd to say that something could have a moral quality without having any kind of natural (or non-moral) quality. So, it seems like Mackie is right in saying that the moral and the natural have to occur together, something we could also extend to the whole normative domain. But he also seems to be right in claiming that these two features do not *merely* occur together: they do in fact occur together, but this does not seem to be the end of the story. Indeed, it appears, among other things, that normative features will vary with non-normative or natural features, rather than merely occurring together with non-normative or natural features. Co-varying seems to be somehow a stronger phenomenon than merely occurring together. It seems also essential to our normative thinking that, if two – let us say – actions are exactly alike in all their non-normative features, they must also be exactly alike in all their normative features.

This last claim is usually illustrated by these classical passages from R. M. Hare (1952, 80–81 and 145):⁵⁷

Let me illustrate one of the most characteristic features of value-words in terms of a particular example. It is a feature sometimes described by saying that ‘good’ and other such words are the names of ‘supervenient’ or ‘consequential’ properties. Suppose that a picture is hanging upon the wall and we are discussing whether it is a good picture; that is to say, we are debating whether to assent to, or dissent from, the judgement ‘P is a good picture’. It must be understood that the context makes it clear that we mean by ‘good picture’ not ‘good likeness’ but ‘good work of art’—though both these uses would be value-expressions. First let us notice a very important peculiarity of the word ‘good’ as used in this sentence. Suppose that there is another picture next to P in the gallery (I will call it Q). Suppose that either P is a replica of Q or Q of P, and we do not know which, but do know that both were painted by the same artist at about the same time. Now there is one thing that we cannot say; we cannot say ‘P is exactly like Q in all respects save this one, that P is a good picture and Q not’. If we were to say this, we should invite the comment, ‘But how can one be good and the other not, if they are exactly alike? There must be some further difference between them to make one good and the other not.’ Unless we at least admit the relevance of the question ‘What makes one good and the other not?’ we are bound to puzzle our hearers; they will think that something has gone wrong with our use of the word ‘good’. Sometimes we cannot specify just what it is that makes one good and the other not; but there always must be something. Suppose that in the attempt to explain our meaning we said: ‘I didn’t say that there was any other difference between them; there is just this one difference, that one is good and the other not. Surely you would understand me if I said that one was signed and the other not, but that there was otherwise no difference? So why shouldn’t I say that one was good and the other not, but that there was otherwise no difference?’ The answer to this protest is that the word ‘good’ is not like the word ‘signed’; there is a difference in their logic.⁵⁸

First, let us take that characteristic of ‘good’ which has been called its supervenience. Suppose that we say ‘St. Francis was a good man’. It is logically impossible to say this and to maintain at the same time that there might have been another man placed in precisely the same circumstances as St. Francis, and who behaved in them in exactly the same way, but who differed from St. Francis in this respect only, that he was not a good man. I am

⁵⁷ Here is what Hare says about the goal of maintaining normative supervenience (1952, 134): “Now since it is the purpose of the word ‘good’ and other value-words to be used for teaching standards, their logic is in accord with this purpose. We are therefore in a position at last to explain the feature of the word ‘good’ which I pointed out at the beginning of this investigation. The reason why I cannot apply the word ‘good’ to one picture, if I refuse to apply it to another picture which I agree to be in all other respects exactly similar, is that by doing this I should be defeating the purpose for which the word is designed. I should be commending one object, and so purporting to teach my hearers one standard, while in the same breath refusing to commend a similar object, and so undoing the lesson just imparted. By seeking to impart two inconsistent standards, I should be imparting no standard at all”.

⁵⁸ Maybe it is not clear from Hare’s quote, but I think we can understand “Q is a perfect replica of P” as not only covering the intrinsic properties of P and Q, nor only the physical properties of P and Q. Indeed, it is possible to believe that relational properties, or other properties than physical properties, are relevant to make a picture good. In such a case, P and Q may be perfectly physically identical, but not identical in their relational properties; this may justify a difference in normative judgment regarding the aesthetic quality of P and Q.

supposing, of course, that the judgement is made in both cases upon the whole life of the subject, 'inner' and overt.

To use Hare's examples, claiming that this Q is exactly like P except that P is good and Q is not, or that this other person was exactly like St. Francis in all his non-normative features but was not a good person, amounts to committing a mistake.⁵⁹ Although, the *kind* of mistake someone would make in asserting that a thing or a person could be normatively different without being non-normatively different is debatable; she could commit a conceptual mistake, a logical mistake, a normative or moral mistake, etc.

However, as should be obvious from Mackie's quote, the "because" relation between normative and non-normative or natural features does not seem to depend only on our normative *thinking*, and it does not seem to concern only our normative *judgments*. This is the difference between, to use James Klagge's classification (1988, 462), ontological and ascriptive supervenience. The former kind of supervenience is about classes of properties, while the latter is about types of judgments; and it is important to emphasize that Mackie seems to point towards an ontological understanding of the relation of supervenience, not towards an ascriptive understanding. In other words, what Mackie is challenging normative non-naturalists to explain is a relation (the "because") that stands between a normative feature and a non-normative feature, not between a normative and a non-normative judgment (following Klagge (1988, 462–63), we could say that Hare, based on what he says in the quote above, has in mind the ascriptive understanding of supervenience).

⁵⁹ To make it clear, P and Q, or St. Francis and this other man, must be *numerically different things*. For more on this, and why it is important, see Kramer (2009, 340).

The plan of this chapter is the following. First, I shall say a few words about this relation of supervenience. This section is intentionally not very committal, in order to avoid excluding any potentially interesting understanding of the relation of supervenience. The second section will be a brief explanation of the main (*pro tanto*) reason to believe in normative supervenience.⁶⁰ The third section of the chapter will introduce the problem supervenience poses against normative non-naturalism. I will introduce two different versions of this problem, but argue that only the second should be considered as a real and important problem for non-naturalists.

2.1. The Principle of Supervenience

Basically, claiming that *A* supervenes upon *B* means two things, that we should see as being roughly equivalent (*A* and *B* are understood as classes or sets of properties). First, it means that there cannot be an *A*-difference without a *B*-difference; second, it means that *A*-properties vary with *B*-properties (McLaughlin and Bennett 2014).⁶¹ These are the most basic things we can say about supervenience; and, strictly speaking, saying that *A* supervenes upon *B* does *not* mean anything more than that.⁶²

Supervenience relations are covariance relations with three logical features: they are reflexive, transitive, and non-symmetric (McLaughlin and Bennett 2014; McPherson 2015). The fact that supervenience relations are reflexive means that every class of properties supervenes on

⁶⁰ Of course, this does not mean that normative non-naturalists have to maintain a supervenience relation of one form or another, but rather that there is some (*prima facie*) reason to believe that there is something like a supervenience relation between normative and non-normative properties.

⁶¹ This section relies heavily on McLaughlin and Bennett's entry on supervenience in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; I consider this entry as being the best introduction to the principle of supervenience in the literature.

⁶² "Supervenience" is often used to mean something stronger, and I see no problem in doing that insofar as what is meant by this stronger relation is made clear. It might be the case that a stronger relation than what is meant so far by "supervenience" holds between normative and non-normative properties, but this would require more argumentation than just arguing for supervenience. Later in this section, I will make a few distinctions between supervenience and entailment and between supervenience and dependence. Whether the supervenience relation between normative and non-normative properties should be explained by a stronger relation will be important later in this thesis (chapter 3, mainly sections 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6).

itself. Indeed, for any class of *A*-properties, there cannot be an *A*-difference without an *A*-difference. This claim might sound trivial, but it is nevertheless crucial to see how some explanations of the relation of supervenience are available to metaethicists.⁶³ The fact that supervenience relations are transitive means that if *A*-properties supervene upon *B*-properties, and if *B*-properties supervene upon *C*-properties, then *A*-properties supervene upon *C*-properties. A relation is non-symmetric if it is neither symmetric nor asymmetric. This also means that sometimes this relation holds symmetrically, sometimes it holds asymmetrically. Here is a quote from McPherson that explains this point (2015, section 1):

The claim that supervenience is *non-symmetric* means that supervenience is compatible with either symmetry (*A* supervenes on *B* and *B* supervenes on *A*; as in the case of the ethical and itself) or asymmetry (*A* supervenes on *B* but *B* does not supervene on *A*; as may be the case between the biological and the microphysical).

A case of reflexive supervenience is trivially a case of symmetric supervenience. To use McLaughlin and Bennett's example: the surface areas of perfect spheres supervene symmetrically on their volumes. However, in some cases, a relation of supervenience holds asymmetrically. McLaughlin and Bennett give the example of the relation between the mental and the physical: this relation of supervenience is asymmetrical because (we assume or believe) the mental supervenes on the physical, but the physical does not supervene on the mental. The reason why is that it is usually assumed or believed that there could be physical differences without mental differences (McLaughlin and Bennett 2014, section 3.2).

⁶³ A realist who believes that normative properties are natural could use the reflexive aspect of the supervenience relation between normative and natural properties to explain why there cannot be any difference at the level of normative properties without having a difference at the level of natural properties. Of course, such an explanation holds insofar as we maintain that normative properties do in fact supervene upon *natural* properties, and not upon *non-normative* properties.

In most cases, it is fair to say that metaethicists believe that the relation of supervenience between the normative and the non-normative or the natural holds, when it holds, asymmetrically: the normative does supervene on the non-normative, but the non-normative does not supervene on the normative, as it is usually understood that there could be non-normative differences without normative differences. However, this point is not trivial, and it might be denied by reductionists.

Another point important to make clear, although it is not in itself a logical feature of supervenience, is that supervenience claims in themselves (i.e. the supervenience relation as it is understood so far) do not purport to explain why the supervenience relation holds. Hence, supervenience claims do not purport to explain why it is so that there cannot be, if *A*-properties supervene upon *B*-properties, an *A*-difference without a *B*-difference, or why *A*-properties covary with *B*-properties. Supervenience claims only state that there is a pattern of covariation between *A*-properties and *B*-properties. Explaining this pattern, strictly speaking, is a question – let me use this expression – “over and above” stating it. Following McPherson, we should say that claims that *explain* supervenience are either grounding⁶⁴ claims or superdupervenience⁶⁵ claims (McPherson 2015, section 1).⁶⁶

Before moving on to normative (or moral) supervenience, it is important to make clear the difference between supervenience and entailment on one hand, and between supervenience and dependence on the other. Entailment is, just like supervenience, a reflexive, transitive, and non-

⁶⁴ Väyrynen (2013).

⁶⁵ Horgan (1993).

⁶⁶ A grounding relation holds between facts, and it is usually understood as being an explanatory relation. Kit Fine is probably the most important metaphysician arguing for a grounding relation, such as “the existence of Socrates grounds that the singleton {Socrates} exists”. Grounding relations are usually understood as explanatory, but non-causal, relations of the kind of “*x* obtains because of *y*” or “*x* obtains in virtue of *y*”. Horgan defines as the following superdupervenience: “ontological supervenience that is robustly explainable in a materialistically explainable way” (1993, 566).

symmetric relation. But, according to McLaughlin and Bennett, entailment is neither necessary nor sufficient for supervenience. Hence, there could be an entailment relation between *A*-properties and *B*-properties without there being a supervenience relation between these properties, and there could be a supervenience relation between *A*-properties and *B*-properties without there being an entailment relation between these properties (2014, section 3.2). McLaughlin and Bennett define the notion of entailment as being the following: “property *P* entails property *Q* just in case it is metaphysically necessary that anything that possesses *P* also possesses *Q*” (2014, section 3.2).

To show that entailment is not sufficient for supervenience, they use the example of the properties of *being a brother* and of *being a sibling*. The property *being a brother* entails *being a sibling*: it is metaphysically necessary that everything that possesses the property of *being a brother* also possesses the property of *being a sibling*. However, the property of *being a sibling* does not supervene on the property of *being a brother*. In this case, there could be a difference at the supervenient level (*being a sibling*) despite being no difference at the base level (*being a brother*). Here is how McLaughlin and Bennett explain this (2014, section 3.2):

To see this, suppose that Sarah has a sister and Jack is an only child. Thus Sarah is a sibling and Jack is not, though neither is a brother. So the *B*-properties can entail the *A*-properties, even though *A* does not supervene on *B*.

To show that entailment is not necessary for supervenience, McLaughlin and Bennett note that supervenience can hold with only nomological necessity (i.e. necessity according to the laws of physics). This is so because the “cannot” in “there cannot be an *A*-difference without a *B*-difference” is open to interpretation. Indeed, supervenience could hold with different degrees of modal force; for instance, it could be a question of metaphysical, logical (or conceptual), or nomological necessity. If a relation of supervenience between *A*-properties and *B*-properties holds with nomological necessity, *A* supervenes on *B*, but there is no entailment relation between

A and *B*. For instance, electrical conductivity properties nomologically supervene upon thermal conductivity properties, but the latter properties do not entail the former properties (McLaughlin and Bennett's example).⁶⁷

As McLaughlin and Bennett explain, in many instances, when someone says that *A* supervenes on *B*, this same person also wants to say – either implicitly or explicitly – that *A*-properties ontologically depend on *B*-properties, or that *A*-properties cannot be instantiated without *B*-properties being instantiated. However, it is important to note that, strictly speaking, nothing about ontological dependence is implied by supervenience alone. Saying that *A*-properties ontologically depend upon *B*-properties is a further commitment. A relation of dependence indeed assumes or aims to state that there is ontological priority between *A*- and *B*-properties, but a relation of supervenience alone cannot assure it. More specifically, when someone says that *A*-properties depend upon *B*-properties in the sense that *B*-properties are ontologically prior to *A*-properties, she has in mind an irreflexive and asymmetrical relation. Indeed, while *A*-properties can supervene upon *A*-properties, *A*-properties cannot depend upon *A*-properties to exist (irreflexivity);⁶⁸ and if *A*-properties depend upon *B*-properties, *B*-properties cannot also depend upon *A*-properties (asymmetry). In other words, “nothing can be ontologically prior to itself, or be ontologically prior to something that is also ontologically prior to it” (McLaughlin and Bennett 2014, section 3.5).

⁶⁷ The example would be different if nomological necessity coincided with metaphysical necessity. As explained by McLaughlin and Bennett, things get more complicated when the issue is to explain the difference between supervenience and entailment when the supervenience relation holds with metaphysical or logical necessity. I do not consider it necessary to go into these details, but see McLaughlin and Bennett for more on these issues (2014, section 3.2).

⁶⁸ To be clear, this does not mean that *A*-properties could not depend on other properties to exist. Also, *A*-properties could be understood as ontologically fundamental, that is to say as needing no other properties to exist.

Dependence relations are appealing, in philosophy in general, and maybe even more so in metaethics, because they could provide an explanation of the “in virtue of” what an action has a specific normative feature. Indeed, dependence relations will give us an “in virtue of” claim, which will explain how it is the case that a given action has a normative feature.⁶⁹ However, it is far from being obvious that a supervenience claim will give us an “in virtue of” claim: the latter claim is stronger (and in a sense, more specific) than the former. McLaughlin and Bennett give the following example to explain how supervenience and dependence differ on this matter (2014, section 3.5):

[F]or any property F , being F supervenes on being $\sim F$: two things cannot differ with respect to being F without differing with respect to being $\sim F$. But, of course, it is not the case that something is F in virtue of being $\sim F$!

There might be a relation of dependence between normative and non-normative or natural properties, but this relation (i) does not follow directly from a relation of supervenience and (ii) is distinct from a relation of supervenience. If someone would like to argue for a relation of dependence between normative and non-normative properties, she cannot derive this directly from the relation of supervenience.

Obviously, more would need to be said about supervenience. But, in order to avoid begging any question, I prefer not to say too much for the moment, and clarify things later when needed.

⁶⁹ An “in virtue of” claim might be fairly complex; it does not have to take the form, although it could, of a claim such as “this action is wrong ‘in virtue of’ failing to maximize utility”. Moreover, this point is similar to what has been said previously about grounding and superdupervenience.

2.2. A *Pro Tanto* Justification of Normative Supervenience

The main reason why most metaethicists –not just normative non-naturalists – seem so inclined to maintain a supervenience relation between normative and non-normative properties is because of the intuitive appeal of some simple cases. Such simple cases could be Hare’s examples introduced at the beginning of this chapter. In the first case, Hare is giving the example of two pictures hanging upon the wall, P and Q. We know that P and Q are perfect replicas, painted by the same artist, etc.⁷⁰ Hence, except for being numerically distinct, P and Q are identical. In such a case, it seems like we are compelled or maybe even forced to say that Q is good if we also say that P is good. In the second case, Hare gives the example of St. Francis, and he says that, insofar as we believe that St. Francis was a good person, we should also believe that anyone exactly alike St. Francis in all his non-normative or non-moral features, and finding himself in the same circumstances than St. Francis, must also be a good person. For many, this supports a supervenience relation between the normative and the non-normative, in the sense that there could not be normative difference without a non-normative difference.

Similarly to Hare, McPherson gives the following example (2015):

Suppose that a bank manager wrongfully embezzles his client’s money. If we imagine holding fixed how much the bank manager stole, and how; the trust his customers placed in him; what he did with the money; all of the short- and long-term consequences of his actions; and so on,⁷¹ it seems that there could not be a second action that perfectly resembled this embezzlement, except that the second action was right rather than wrong.

⁷⁰ I recall that this does not necessarily mean that only physical properties of P and Q are relevant here; we may very well argue that relational properties (or other properties than the physical properties of P and Q) are relevant. Hence, we may believe that aesthetic properties do not supervene upon physical properties, but upon physical properties plus other properties.

⁷¹ One important issue concerns what should be included and covered by this “and so on”, and how broad or wide we should go to make sense of this idea that there cannot be normative difference without non-normative difference. I am not sure we could give any neutral definition of what should be included by this “and so on” clause.

These simple cases all seem to suggest one thing: the normative features of – let us say – a person cannot vary on their own. For instance, the normative features of the bank manager cannot change if his non-normative features do not change; and someone else doing the same thing as the bank manager in the same circumstances will have the same normative features as the bank manager. Many will be content to say that this connection is purely a constraint on our normative thinking. However, as we will discuss in section 2.3.2, it is not clear that, for realists, it would be sufficient to say that the claim that there cannot be a normative difference without a non-normative difference is purely a constraint on our normative thinking, as it seems to be grounded in a metaphysical relation between normative and non-normative features. (This specific issue of metaphysical relation will come back in the next chapter.) Indeed, at least for robust realists, the supervenience relation seems to be something that points towards a metaphysical relation between the normative and non-normative properties, something that belongs to the metaphysics of normative or non-normative properties. In following McPherson, we should say that the bank manager example (and Hare's examples) suggests a necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative, as it suggests that the normative features of a person *cannot* change on their own.

Furthermore, it seems like there is nothing particular about the example of the bank manager that makes it the case that, for this case only, there must be a necessary connection between the normative and non-normative features. Otherwise put, we can generalize what we think about the bank manager (and about Hare's cases) to *all* the other cases we could think of (McPherson 2015). This is specifically the kind of inductive reasoning that supports the claim that there is a supervenience relation between the normative and the non-normative and that this relation is necessary. With the principle of supervenience, all we do is to regroup individual

specific necessary connections under a single necessary connection, such as “there cannot be a normative difference without a non-normative difference”, or “non-normative properties must necessarily vary with normative properties”.

It is also possible to think of another reason to believe in supervenience, such as the fact that we could not imagine a situation where something or someone has a normative feature *without* having any non-normative feature. This reason is grounded in the claim that normative properties are “second-order features” or “dependent features”, that is to say the kind of features that something or someone could have only in virtue of having other kinds of features. This is not yet a justification of supervenience, as it does not imply that there could not be a normative difference without a non-normative difference, but it could – perhaps only indirectly – support normative supervenience as it suggests that normative features depend on, and will somehow vary with, non-normative features.⁷² Indeed, the claim that we could not conceive of two individuals identical to each other in respect of all their non-normative features⁷³ without also being identical in respect of their normative features does suggest that normative features vary with non-normative features.

However, these reasons to believe in normative supervenience are only *pro tanto* reasons, as they rely on an intuition we have about specific cases and on an inductive argument we can build from those cases.⁷⁴ This intuition, like all intuitions, could be wrong and we may have to revise or drop it. Nevertheless, it suggests that we are, at least *pro tanto*, justified in believing that there is a relation of supervenience between normative and non-normative properties.

⁷² Dependence relations usually being understood as stronger than supervenience relations, I assume here that a dependence relation between the normative and the non-normative would imply that the normative supervenes upon the non-normative.

⁷³ Again, the issue of which non-normative features we have to cover is a very important one.

⁷⁴ For an interesting analysis of the reasons to be sceptical of supervenience (mainly as a conceptual or *a priori* truth), see Roberts’ manuscript “Why Believe in Normative Supervenience?” (Roberts, n.d.).

Anyone denying this relation of supervenience between normative and non-normative properties should explain why we have the intuition that there is such a relation between these properties, why our intuition is wrong, and how it could be revised (if it could) to make it consistent with our best metaethical theory.

2.3. How Should We Understand the Problem of Supervenience?

To refer again to Mackie's quote that opens this chapter, the relation of supervenience between normative and non-normative properties seems to call for an explanation, and Mackie was most likely also intending to imply that the normative realist will face a great amount of difficulty explaining it. Indeed, I think it is fair to say that Mackie was not only saying that there is a relation that calls for an explanation; he was also somehow saying that this explanation will be, in the best case scenario, hard to find, and, in the worst case scenario, impossible to find. However, Mackie did not develop the full details of this problem, which I will call the "Problem of Supervenience".

In this section, my intention is to introduce a full-length version of this problem as it should be understood to be a problem for normative non-naturalists. I believe the problem of supervenience against non-naturalism will be more convincing if it focuses on the idea that normative non-naturalists are in special metaphysical trouble. Hence, the reach of the problem of supervenience should be modest: it should aim to show that normative non-naturalists are in metaphysical difficulty, mainly because they believe that normative properties are *sui generis*. It should not aim to show, for instance, that naturalists are also in trouble. Indeed, if, as it is often thought, causal properties supervene on one another without any problem, and if naturalists hold that normative properties are causal, they may not face any problem explaining supervenience. This does not mean that these naturalists are not also in trouble regarding other metaphysical

issues, but that the point of the problem of supervenience as it will be understood is not to show this. Hence, the point of the problem of supervenience is to introduce something that is specifically problematic for non-naturalists to support this idea that *they* are in metaphysical trouble.⁷⁵

In the following subsections, I shall introduce two versions of the problem of supervenience; the goal being to identify the best version of the problem as a problem for non-naturalism. The first version was first introduced in 1971, in “Moral Realism”, a paper by Simon Blackburn, a few years before Mackie published *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*.⁷⁶ The second version of the problem of supervenience has been recently introduced by McPherson, in a paper called “Ethical Non-Naturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience” (2012).

As I shall try to make clear in the following pages, the difference between Blackburn’s and McPherson’s versions of the problem of supervenience is, first, between a conceptual (Blackburn) and a metaphysical (McPherson) problem, and, second, between a weak (Blackburn) and a strong (McPherson) understanding of the relation of supervenience. I shall argue that only the second version of the problem of supervenience represents a real problem for normative non-naturalists.

⁷⁵ In other words, the problem of supervenience should be modest in the sense that it should be a problem primarily addressed against non-naturalism, and not addressed against all normative realists or all – to use a category that encompasses realists and more – cognitivists about normativity.

⁷⁶ In “Supervenience Revisited”, a paper first published in 1984, Blackburn says that his version of the problem of supervenience was suggested to him by Casimir Lewy, and that it was specially directed at G.E. Moore’s “The Conception of Intrinsic Value”. Both “Moral Realism” and “Supervenience Revisited” have been reprinted in Blackburn’s *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (1993a). From now on, I will always refer to the reprinted version of these two papers.

2.3.1. Blackburn's Understanding of the Problem of Supervenience

First and foremost, it is important to introduce how Blackburn understands and defines the relation of supervenience.⁷⁷ In “Moral Realism”, he introduces the following definition of supervenience (1993b, 115):

(S) A property M is supervenient upon properties $N_1 \dots N_n$ if M is not identical with any of $N_1 \dots N_n$ nor with any truth function of them, and it is logically impossible that a thing should become M , or cease to be M , or become more or less M than before, without changing in respect of some member of $N_1 \dots N_n$.⁷⁸

It is important to stress that the supervenience relation between moral (or normative) and natural properties is understood here in terms of what is logically possible or impossible. As Blackburn says (1993b, 115), “[i]t should be noted that (S) [...] define[s] supervenience in terms of logical impossibility, and it is a logical claim about the interrelations of sets of properties that is being made”. This means that, if someone says that the action α is identical in every natural aspect to the action β but maintains that α is good and that β is not good, this person would commit a logical mistake. For instance, we could say that this person is not a competent moral thinker, that she does not understand what moral thinking really consists in, etc.

⁷⁷ Blackburn is discussing a relation of supervenience between *moral* and *natural* properties, but I think what is said about the supervenience of moral properties could (and should) also be said about normative properties in general.

⁷⁸ Blackburn also believes that the following relation of supervenience holds between the moral and the natural (1993b, 115):

(S₂) A property M is supervenient₂ upon properties $N_1 \dots N_n$ if M is not identical with any of $N_1 \dots N_n$ or with any truth function of them, and it is logically impossible that two things should each possess the same properties from the set $N_1 \dots N_n$ to the same degree, without both failing to possess M , or both possessing M , to the same degree.

For Blackburn, (S) and (S₂) are somehow equivalent, and if moral properties supervene upon natural properties, they also supervene₂ upon natural properties (and probably vice versa). It is also important to note that both (S) and (S₂) define supervenience in terms of what is logically impossible. It is also, as far as I know, unusual to put in the definition of supervenience a condition according to which M is supervenient upon N if M is not identical to N . I will not discuss this issue here, but for some philosophers it is possible that supervenience entails reduction (Jackson 1998). If it is indeed the case that supervenience entails reduction, it will turn out that Blackburn's understanding of supervenience was mistaken. However, non-naturalists believe that supervenience does not entail supervenience, as most of them both believe that normative properties supervene upon non-normative properties without being reducible to them.

According to Blackburn, normative (and moral) realists, including non-naturalists, should maintain (S), and they should seek to explain it; but (S) alone does not represent a problem for normative realists. Normative realists are in trouble, according to Blackburn, once we add the claim (E) to the picture (1993b, 116):

(E) There is no moral proposition whose truth is entailed by any proposition ascribing naturalistic properties to its subject.

Blackburn maintains that normative non-naturalists do believe that (E) holds. (E) means that there is a lack of entailment from a naturalistic proposition to a moral proposition, or that we cannot derive a moral proposition from a set of propositions concerning only natural properties. This last point is often referred to as being Hume's thesis, introduced in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, that we cannot derive an ought from an is. Blackburn does not give any positive specification of what (E) really consists in, but he nevertheless gives some negative specifications: it "is not the claim that moral properties are not identical with any naturalistic ones"; it "is not the claim that there are no naturalistic properties that are *necessarily reasons* for an ascription of a moral property"; and it "is not the denial that there exist criteria, in a Wittgensteinian sense, for the ascription of moral properties" (Blackburn 1993b, 116–17).

The problem of supervenience arises only when we combine (S) and (E), when we believe that both (S) and (E) hold – as normative non-naturalists believe according to Blackburn. For him, something mysterious is going to follow from the conjunction of (S) and (E), something for which normative non-naturalists have no explanation. To illustrate this point, Blackburn proposes to think about the following situation (1993b, 118):

Imagine a thing *A*, which has a certain set of naturalistic properties and relations. *A* also has a certain degree of moral worth: say, it is very good. This, according to the realist, reports the existence of a state of affairs: *A*'s goodness. Now the existence of this state of affairs is not entailed by *A* being as it is in all naturalistic respects. This means, since all the propositions involved are entirely contingent, that the existence of this state of affairs is not strictly

implied by *A* being as it is in all naturalistic respects. That is, it is logically possible that *A* should be as it is in all naturalistic respects, yet this further state of affairs not exist.

The problem, for Blackburn, lies exactly in the last sentence of the quote. Why is it not logically possible for *A* to stay as it is in all its naturalistic respects, but cease to be very good? If normative non-naturalists believe in (E), and are aware of what this claim implies, they should rather embrace the fact that it is logically possible for *A* to cease to be good (or to cease to be *very* good) even if *A* does not go through any change at the level of natural properties. Indeed, following what seem to be the implications of (E), normative non-naturalists should say “yes, it is possible for *A* to stay exactly alike in all its naturalistic respects, but to cease to be very good.” However, if normative non-naturalists also believe in (S), they must say the opposite; they must maintain that it is guaranteed, logically, that *A* will stay very good if it does not go through some changes at the natural level. Hence the problem of supervenience: (S) and (E) cannot both be maintained, but – according to Blackburn – normative non-naturalists must maintain both. Moreover, for Blackburn, an antirealist of his sort (projectivist / expressivist / quasi-realist) has a better explanation of supervenience than the realist has.⁷⁹

This completes what Blackburn says about the problem of supervenience in “Moral Realism”. However, as I said earlier, he also published a paper in 1984, called “Supervenience Revisited”, in which he – as the title of the paper suggests – revisits his argument. Blackburn did not really change his mind between 1971 and 1984: he still believes that normative non-naturalists face a problem with supervenience, but he expresses the problem in somewhat clearer and more specific terms in “Supervenience Revisited”. This is the reason why it is necessary to go over what Blackburn says in this paper.

⁷⁹ I introduce Blackburn’s explanation of supervenience later in this section.

In “Supervenience Revisited”, Blackburn defines the supervenience relation between moral and natural properties as being the following (1993c, 131; emphasis in the original):

Th[e] supervenience claim means that in *some* sense of ‘necessary’ it is necessarily true that if an *F* truth changes, then some *G* truth changes, or, necessarily, if two situations are identical in point of *G* facts, then they are identical in terms of *F* facts as well.

More formally, Blackburn understands supervenience as being the following relation (1993c, 131):

$$(S) N ((\exists x)(Fx \ \& \ [G^*x \ \& \ (G^*xUFx)]) \supset (\forall y)(G^*y \supset Fy))^{80}$$

“*N*” refers to what is necessary, “*G**” refers to “some definite total set of *G* truths”, and “*U*” to a relation that “holds when [*G**] ‘underlies’ [*F*]” (1993c, 131). More specifically, by “*U*”, Blackburn refers to the fact that, when something has a moral feature, this thing has this feature “in virtue of” being in some underlying *G* state, which is precisely what Blackburn calls *G**. Hence, (S) means that, as a matter of necessity, if there exists something *x* that is *F*, and if *G** underlies *x*’s being *F*, then anything else *G** is also *F*. Blackburn is also careful to distinguish (S) from (N), which is a stronger relation of necessity (1993c, 131):

$$(N) N (\forall x)(G^*x \supset Fx)^{81}$$

(N) does not follow from (S); the latter relation necessitates a conditional, while the former relation necessitates the consequent of that conditional.⁸²

⁸⁰ For the sake of clarity, I added to Blackburn’s formulation the square bracket in the antecedent and the universal quantifier in the consequent.

⁸¹ There is no quantifier for (N) in Blackburn’s paper; for the sake of clarity, I added the universal quantifier.

⁸² Because of this, Blackburn’s understanding of the problem of supervenience is best understood as being about a *weak* understanding of the principle of supervenience (i.e. “weak supervenience”). McPherson’s understanding of this same problem, as it will be made clear in a moment, is about a *strong* understanding of this principle (i.e. “strong supervenience”). I think the problem of supervenience understood as being about “strong supervenience” represents a more forceful problem for non-naturalism. As I will explain in section 2.3.2.1, “strong supervenience” also represents more appropriately non-naturalists’ commitment to a relation of supervenience.

According to Blackburn, there is no inconsistency in a view that maintains (S) and maintains at the same time the following relation (P), where “*P*” refers to what is possible (1993c, 132):⁸³

$$(P) P (\exists x)(G^*x \ \& \ \sim Fx)$$

What (P) means is that it is possible that there is a thing that is *G** but that is not *F*. Indeed, because (S) fails to imply (N) – which is inconsistent with (P) –, it is possible that both (S) and (P) hold. This is what Blackburn refers to as the (S)/(P) combination.⁸⁴ In “Supervenience Revisited”, Blackburn says explicitly that it was the (S)/(P) combination that was occupying him in “Moral Realism”. Hence, we have to understand (S) as defined in “Supervenience Revisited” as referring to (S) as defined in “Moral Realism”, and (P) as referring to (E). Thus, according to Blackburn, normative realists are committed to (P): it is possible that *G**, which happens to underlie *F* (something that holds insofar as we maintain (S)), might not have done so, or might cease to do so. This is the reason why it is possible for a thing to be *G** but not *F*. This roughly refers to (E), in the sense that *G** does not entail *F*. Hence, it is logically possible that something is *G** without being *F*.

To recapitulate, while in “Moral Realism” it was the combination of (S) and (E) that was leading to a mystery, in “Supervenience Revisited” it is the combination of (S) and (P) that is leading to the same mystery (or at least to a mystery very close to the one introduced in the first

⁸³ For Blackburn, it seems possible to maintain (S) and to believe that (N) is false, at least for non-naturalists. Although, according to Majors, one needs to confuse local and global supervenience claims to believe that (S) is true but (N) false (2009, 47–48). Hence, if it is the case that one needs to confuse local and global supervenience claims for (S) to hold without (N), then it would be a reason to abandon Blackburn’s version of the problem of supervenience.

⁸⁴ This holds insofar as non-naturalists maintain (P) but not (N). Blackburn seems to believe that all normative realists do maintain (P) (or (E)). However, I doubt a reductionist normative realist will be very compelled to maintain (P) (or (E)). This is the reason why when Blackburn talks about “normative realism”, I think he is best understood as referring to non-naturalism.

paper). Again, Blackburn will argue that this mystery is best solved by an antirealist view (more on this later).

The reason why the (S)/(P) combination implies a mystery for realists is because of the ban on mixed worlds. A mixed world is a possible world in which some things are G^* and F , and some are G^* but not F (1993c, 134). The possible worlds in which anything G^* is also F are understood as being the G^*/F worlds; the possible worlds in which anything G^* is not also F the G^*/O worlds; and the mixed world the $G^*/F \vee O$ worlds. In other words, a mixed world ($G^*/F \vee O$) is a world in which there are some things that are G^* and F , and there are some things that are G^* but not F . *Prima facie*, it appears like we should provide a ban on mixed worlds. At least, we should provide an explanation of why it is not possible, within the same possible world, for things that are G^* sometimes to be F and some other times not to be F .⁸⁵ The reason why we have to ban mixed worlds is because they are inconsistent with (S). Indeed, insofar as (S) is understood under the terms of weak supervenience,⁸⁶ it implies that within a world, insofar as G^* underlies F , everything that is G^* must be F . Then, Blackburn raises the following question: if mixed worlds have to be banned, what is the authority behind the ban? As he explains (1993c, 135):

[The ban on mixed worlds] is a ban on interworld travel by things that are, individually, at home. The problem that I posed is that of finding out the authority behind this ban. Why the embargo on travel? The difficulty is that once we have imagined a G^*/F world and a G^*/O world, it is as if we have done enough to also imagine a $G^*/F \vee O$ world, and have implicitly denied ourselves a right to forbid its existence. At least, if we are to forbid its existence, we need some explanation of why we can do so.

⁸⁵ The “we” in this sentence refers not only to normative realists, but also to metaethicists that are not realists (whether it refers to *all* metaethicists is, I believe, a question I do not need to answer).

⁸⁶ (S) is understood as being an instance of weak supervenience because there is only one necessity connector that binds the whole formula, instead of two necessity connectors (one that binds the whole formula, and the other the conditional of the consequent).

To be clear, Blackburn believes that we should ban mixed worlds, but he also believes that projectivism (the word he was using in 1984 to refer to his view) has a better explanation than realists. Also, if we stretch things a little bit, we could also say that Blackburn believes that realists have no explanation at all for this ban, or at least no explanation that will be consistent with their view.

Let me summarize Blackburn's argument in the following way (inspired by McPherson (2015, section 3.1)):

1. Supervenience: $N((\exists x)(Fx \ \& \ [G^*x \ \& \ (G^*x \supset Fx)]) \supset (\forall y)(G^*y \supset Fy))$
2. Lack of entailment: $P(\exists x)(G^*x \ \& \ \sim Fx)$
3. It is conceptually impossible that the action α is $(G^* \ \& \ F)$ and the action β is $(G^* \ \& \ \sim F)$ (from 1).
4. It is conceptually possible that the action α is $(G^* \ \& \ F)$ (from 1)
5. It is conceptually possible that the action β is $(G^* \ \& \ \sim F)$ (from 2).
6. α is $(G^* \ \& \ F)$ and β is $(G^* \ \& \ \sim F)$ are each conceptually possible (from 4 and 5), but they are not conceptually co-possible (from 3).

What is, according to Blackburn, difficult for the normative realist to explain is the idea that α being $(G^* \ \& \ F)$ and β being $(G^* \ \& \ \sim F)$ is not a conceptually co-possible thing. This is the ban on mixed worlds: on the one hand, it is conceptually possible that α is $(G^* \ \& \ F)$, and, on the other hand, it is conceptually possible that β is $(G^* \ \& \ \sim F)$; but these two conceptually possible things cannot both be true at the same time (or in the same world). This ban on mixed worlds calls for an explanation, and it seems like non-naturalists cannot provide an explanation for this ban because they are committed both to (S) and (P).

For an antirealist like Blackburn, the ban on mixed worlds is explained by, first, pointing to the fact that we usually evaluate a thing based on its natural properties (that is to say, the only properties a thing could have). Our normative evaluations have – if we may use this expression – a ground, and this ground has to be found in the natural world. The explanation will continue by stating the following (Blackburn 1993b, 122):

Now it is not possible to hold an attitude to a thing because of its possessing certain properties and, at the same time, not hold that attitude to another thing that is believed to have the same properties. The nonexistence of the attitude in the second case shows that it is not because of the shared properties that I hold it in the first case.

Blackburn continues by saying that claiming that α is $(G^* \ \& \ F)$ and at the same time claiming that β is $(G^* \ \& \ \sim F)$ amounts to “misidentifying a caprice as a moral opinion” (1993b, 122). Hence, while Blackburn is saying “it is not possible to”, I think his point is best understood as being about what is “morally permissible” rather than what is “possible”. Or, if we still want to talk about what is possible or not, we should say that it is not possible to hold the beliefs that α is $(G^* \ \& \ F)$ and that β is $(G^* \ \& \ \sim F)$ because doing so undermines what makes morality possible.⁸⁷ Indeed, in *Spreading the Word*, Blackburn maintains that we need to respect the constraint of supervenience in order to make morality – or moral thinking – possible (1984, 186):

If we allowed ourselves a system (shmoralizing) which was like ordinary evaluative practice, but subject to no such constraint [of supervenience], then it would allow us to treat naturally identical cases in morally different ways. This could be good shmoralizing. But that would unfit shmoralizing from being any kind of guide to practical decision-making [...].

We could explain the ban on mixed worlds by evoking what is essential to proper moralizing: it has to be a kind of guide to practical decision-making, and a system of values where mixed worlds are allowed would prevent taking proper practical decisions as it would undermine the very point of the practice of moralizing. Hence, in order to form decisions about what we ought to do, we need to ban mixed worlds; even if it is still conceptually possible that α is $(G^* \ \& \ F)$ and that β is $(G^* \ \& \ \sim F)$, they are not conceptually co-possible under the terms of good moralizing for the very reason that otherwise would undermine the practice of moralizing. Indeed, not respecting the constraint of supervenience amounts to doing something else than

⁸⁷ Considering that it is hard to believe that holding the beliefs that α is $(G^* \ \& \ F)$ and that β is $(G^* \ \& \ \sim F)$ would make morality impossible, I consider it best to understand what Blackburn is saying as a claim about what is morally permissible rather than what is possible. Although I might be wrong about this, I do not think Blackburn is trying to make a point about what is metaphysically possible here.

moralizing: shmoralizing. Thus, Blackburn can explain why mixed worlds should be banned, while non-naturalists cannot – or so Blackburn believes. This completes the explanation of how, firstly, Blackburn’s version of the problem of supervenience creates difficulties for normative non-naturalists, and, secondly, how he believes his antirealist view is in a good position to respond to this problem.

2.3.2. Replies to Blackburn’s Argument

In this section, I will introduce two lines of reply to Blackburn’s supervenience argument. The first line of reply is more specific (and probably more convincing), directly targeting Blackburn’s problem. This reply can be found, for instance, in Shafer-Landau’s *Moral Realism* (2003, 84–89). Briefly, it consists in denying Blackburn’s claim that non-naturalists are committed to the lack of entailment thesis. The second line of reply is more general, and it consists in saying that Blackburn has failed to introduce a problem specifically for normative non-naturalism, and maybe even for normative realism in general. This line of reply argues that, if it is the case that Blackburn has failed to introduce a specific problem for non-naturalism, non-naturalists need not be bothered too much by it.

2.3.2.1. First Reply

According to Shafer-Landau, normative non-naturalists could simply reject or abandon the lack of entailment thesis (either (E) or (P)). As I explained earlier, it is the (S)/(P) combination that, according to Blackburn, causes so much trouble for non-naturalists. The reason why this is so is because the (S)/(P) combination leads to contradictory claims about the possibility of mixed worlds: (S) implies that mixed worlds should be banned, while (P) is what allows the possibility of mixed worlds in the first place. However, if, as Shafer-Landau thinks they should do, non-

naturalists reject (P), then the (S)/(P) combination does not hold anymore, and, therefore, Blackburn's problem of supervenience does not hold either.

For Shafer-Landau, *naturalist* realists will most likely believe that there is, minimally, an entailment from the non-normative properties that are underlying (to use Blackburn's word) a given normative property and this normative property. These normative realists will, it seems obvious, deny the lack of entailment between natural and normative properties.⁸⁸ Shafer-Landau also believes that *non-naturalist* realists could maintain roughly the same thing, and then reject the lack of entailment thesis (2003, 85).⁸⁹ Not only could they reject the lack of entailment thesis, Shafer-Landau also seems to say that non-naturalists may have never supported the lack of entailment thesis. Hence, Shafer-Landau's point is, first, that it is far from being obvious that non-naturalists have to maintain the lack of entailment thesis and, second, that it is not clear that non-naturalists were ever committed to that thesis.

In order to, maybe not argue, but show that non-naturalists were never committed to the lack of entailment thesis, Shafer-Landau quotes the following passage from Moore (1942, 588; emphases in the original):

It is true, indeed, that I should never have thought of suggesting that goodness was 'non-natural,' unless I had supposed that it was 'derivative' in the sense that, whenever a thing is good (in the sense in question) its goodness (in Mr. Broad's words) 'depends on the presence of certain non-ethical characteristics' possessed by the thing in question: I have always supposed that it did so 'depend,' in the sense that, if a thing is good (in my sense), then that it is so *follows* from the fact that it possesses certain natural intrinsic properties, which are such that from the fact that it is good it does *not* follow conversely that it has those properties.

As noted by Shafer-Landau, Moore does not use the word "entail", but the words "depend" and "follow" could be understood as referring to a relation of entailment. In the passage quoted, Moore tries to make clear that he believes that the goodness of a thing (a normative feature)

⁸⁸ See Dreier (1992, 18–22) for more on this.

⁸⁹ Of course, non-naturalists would have, *contra* naturalists, to maintain that normative properties are still not natural even if they are metaphysically entailed by some natural properties.

depends on and follows from the natural (intrinsic) properties of that thing.⁹⁰ Importantly, Moore denies that entailment goes both ways: he affirms that it holds from the natural to the normative or the moral, but he denies that it holds from the normative or the moral to the natural. Hence, Moore is saying that it is metaphysically necessary that, if a thing possesses certain natural (intrinsic) properties N_a , this thing possesses some normative property N_o , but it is not metaphysically necessary that, if a thing possesses the normative property N_o , then it possesses the natural (intrinsic) properties N_a . From this, Shafer-Landau concludes that, whether they prefer naturalism or non-naturalism, normative realists can avoid Blackburn's problem of supervenience because they can reject the lack of entailment thesis that Blackburn is attributing to them, assuming they were committed to that thesis (Shafer-Landau 2003, 85).⁹¹ Importantly, non-naturalists could reject the lack of entailment thesis without necessarily maintaining that normative properties depend or follow from *intrinsic* properties of things.

More specifically, for Shafer-Landau, we can avoid a commitment to mixed worlds if we say that the non-normative features of something *fix* or *determine* its normative features, or if we maintain a strong rather than a weak understanding of the supervenience relation. Indeed, if normative properties are metaphysically fixed or determined by non-normative properties, as

⁹⁰ This is a very strong thesis, as it is far from being obvious that normative properties depend on, follow from, or supervene upon the natural intrinsic properties of a person or a thing. Indeed, even cases such as St. Francis being a good person do not necessarily suggest that St. Francis' goodness supervenes on his natural intrinsic properties. However, this would most likely mean that the supervenience relation between the normative and the non-normative is best understood as a global supervenience claim, not as an individual supervenience claim. I assume for the moment that non-naturalists maintain an individual supervenience claim, as it is necessary to do so for Blackburn's problem to hold. However, as we will see in section 2.3.3, it is not obvious that non-naturalists agree to an individual supervenience claim; and if non-naturalists rather agree to a global supervenience claim, then I do not think Blackburn's problem could be valid anymore.

⁹¹ There are also independent reasons to maintain strong rather than weak supervenience. For instance, if we believe that the example of St. Francis is compelling, it does not matter whether the person identical to St. Francis is actual or possible. This seems to support strong supervenience, as it suggests that our intuition applies across worlds. Or, as Horgan says, the idea that, for two persons not to have the same normative features, they must have different non-normative features, applies across different possible worlds (1993, 568). See also Väyrynen (2017, 172).

Shafer-Landau thinks they are (2003, 72–78),⁹² then mixed worlds are *metaphysically* blocked.⁹³

In other words, Blackburn’s mistake would have been to say that non-naturalists believe in weak supervenience, while in fact they believe in strong supervenience.⁹⁴ Indeed, by denying the lack of entailment thesis, and by maintaining that normative properties are entailed by non-normative properties, non-naturalists commit themselves to a strong understanding of supervenience. Hence, because Blackburn is building a problem on two principles that non-naturalists do not maintain (“weak supervenience” and “lack of entailment”), he has failed to introduce a problem that should be really worrying for non-naturalists.

Using Blackburn’s comprehension of the relation of supervenience, which is best understood as an expression of weak supervenience, we can understand strong supervenience as being the following principle:

Weak Supervenience: $N((\exists x)(Fx \ \& \ [G^*x \ \& \ (G^*xUFx)]) \supset (\forall y)(G^*y \supset Fy))$

Strong Supervenience: $N(\forall x)(Fx \supset ([G^*x \ \& \ (G^*xUFx)] \ \& \ N(\forall y)(G^*y \supset Fy)))$ ⁹⁵

⁹² Shafer-Landau may have changed his view since 2003. For more details on what might be his current view, see Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014). Shafer-Landau’s view of 2003 and Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s view of 2014 will be discussed in the next chapter (sections 3.5.1 and 3.3.2).

⁹³ It *might* be possible to say that in w_1 N_a entails N_o , but fails to do in w_2 , but a world in which N_a both entails and does not entail N_o is not metaphysically possible according to such a view. Most likely, a normative realist maintaining that natural properties fix normative properties would say that they do so necessarily in all possible worlds; so if N_a entails N_o in w_1 , it will also do so in $w_2, w_3 \dots w_n$.

⁹⁴ Here is a quote from Väyrynen that helps understanding this point (2017, 172; emphases in the original): “To use a classic example from R. M. Hare, if St. Francis was a good person, then *anyone* exactly like him in all other respects *couldn’t but have been* good as well (Hare 1952, 145). What difference would it make whether a duplicate of St. Francis were actual or merely possible? None, it seems. Accordingly, the supervenience challenge to non-naturalism is best understood in terms of *strong* supervenience, which constrains variations among any possible entities”. And here is what Enoch says to support strong supervenience (2011, 141; emphases in the original): “I think that the price of rejecting supervenience is unacceptably high. The thought that there could be two naturally indistinguishable things where one of them is good (or a good something-or-other) and the other isn’t, is just so highly implausible, that if it were implied by a metaethical view, this would qualify, I think, as an adequate *reductio* of that view. This is also why I go all the way in endorsing *strong* supervenience: the thought that a mere difference in modal location – in which possible world something is – can all alone, without a natural difference, make (or indicate) a normative difference seems utterly implausible to me, barely intelligible even”.

⁹⁵ A more common definition of strong supervenience is the following (Väyrynen 2017, 172):

$N(\forall F \text{ in } \alpha)(\forall x)[Fx \supset (\exists G \text{ in } \beta)(Gx \ \& \ N(\forall y)(Gy \supset Fy))]$

This definition will be discussed in section 2.3.3.

The difference between weak and strong supervenience is the introduction of a second necessity operator that binds the consequent of the conditional in strong supervenience, while in weak supervenience there is only one necessity operator that binds the whole formula. With strong supervenience, which would be the proper understanding of this principle for normative realists (including non-naturalist realists) according to this line of reply, (P) and mixed worlds are straightly blocked. Indeed, if G^* underlies F in a world, G^* *necessarily* underlies F in all possible worlds. Hence, it is necessarily the case that everything G^* is also F ; and because it would now be impossible to have an action β that is $(G^* \ \& \ \sim F)$, both (P) and mixed worlds are necessarily blocked.⁹⁶

However, Blackburn may say that this line of reply misses the point. Indeed, for Blackburn, (S) and (P) are conceptual modal claims; if (P) is true, then it is *conceptually* possible that natural properties fixing the normative properties cease to do so at a later moment within the same possible world. Hence, even if Shafer-Landau's reply to Blackburn's argument according to which weak supervenience misrepresents non-naturalists' understanding of the relation of supervenience may be convincing, by referring to a metaphysical necessary entailment relation between the non-normative and the normative Shafer-Landau has not really explained why the mixed worlds should be banned as a *conceptual* possibility. At this stage of the argument, Shafer-Landau's strategy seems to try to defuse the problem; as he says (2003, 86):

⁹⁶ Alex Miller argues that realists' arguments for strong supervenience are not good enough to justify anyone maintaining strong over weak supervenience. More specifically, according to Miller, since the idea of possible states of affairs having some normative properties is irrelevant and unnecessary to our moral evaluation (he supports this point by arguing that "exist" is not a predicate), it is not necessary to assume strong supervenience. Indeed, weak supervenience does all the work we need the relation of supervenience to do. I think Miller is mistaken in trying to encapsulate normative realists' commitment to supervenience purely in terms of moral evaluation and of ascriptive supervenience, but I will nevertheless entertain the possibility for non-naturalists to maintain weak supervenience in section 4.2.3.

If certain base properties *metaphysically* necessitate the presence of specified moral properties, then the *conceptual* possibility that they fail to do so reveals only a limitation on our appreciation of the relevant metaphysical relations. There is no deep explanatory puzzle resisting resolution here.

While for Shafer-Landau there is no deep puzzle calling for an explanation, for Blackburn the puzzle has simply been left untouched by Shafer-Landau, because he has not explained how mixed worlds could be banned as a conceptual possibility. As Cole Mitchell argues in discussing Shafer-Landau's answer to Blackburn, a constitution relation between non-normative and normative properties might explain supervenience itself (the kind of relation Shafer-Landau believes holds between non-normative and normative properties), but it fails to explain the status of supervenience as a conceptual constraint on moral evaluation.⁹⁷ It would be this last idea, namely supervenience as a conceptual constraint, that we should seek to explain according to Blackburn (Mitchell forthcoming, 11). As Mitchell concludes: even after what Shafer-Landau says, "[w]e are [...] left wondering why supervenience acts as a conceptual constraint on moral evaluation" (forthcoming, 12).

Here, assuming non-naturalists want to explain how supervenience acts as a conceptual constraint on our moral thinking, I think the best answer they could propose is that supervenience acts as a conceptual constraint on moral evaluation because our moral concepts – or our moral thinking – constitutively aim at the truth (and that the truth is understood as non-naturalists understand it; see section 1.1). In other words, non-naturalists could explain how supervenience acts as a conceptual constraint by appealing to the idea that we should consider our uses of moral concepts as aiming at getting things right, insofar as we are taking moral evaluation seriously. Hence, I think that non-naturalists could maintain (almost) everything Blackburn says in order to

⁹⁷ Importantly, Shafer-Landau cannot say that the conceptual constraint of supervenience is explained by a metaphysically impossibility. The reason is that he acknowledges the we can conceive of the conceptual possibility of some base properties not necessitating some moral properties (Shafer-Landau 2003, 86).

explain why supervenience is a conceptual truth, and how it acts as a conceptual constraint on our evaluation, although they also need to say that this is so because our moral evaluations aim at the truth and that someone not aiming at the truth is not “playing the game” of moral evaluation.⁹⁸ Hence, they will add to Blackburn’s explanation that if we have good reason to believe that it is true that α is $(G^* \ \& \ F)$, and that our moral concepts aim at the truth, then we cannot also maintain that it is true that β is $(G^* \ \& \ \sim F)$. Otherwise, we would not consider our moral concepts as constitutively aiming at the truth.

Not respecting this constraint would amount to bad moralizing, just as Blackburn says it would. However, for non-naturalists, it would amount to bad moralizing because it would violate a constitutive principle of moralizing according to which our moral concepts aim at the truth. If someone does not respect the constraint of supervenience, then this person fails to moralize properly because moralizing properly implies trying to get things right; trying to get things right is constitutive of moralizing. Not respecting the constraint of supervenience implies a failure to get things right because things are good or bad – or merely “not good” – because of their lower-order properties;⁹⁹ and this seems to be the reason why, for non-naturalists, moral concepts constitutively aim at the truth. Hence, identical actions in their non-normative features cannot both be good and not good at the same time. On this point, Blackburn seems to agree, as he says

⁹⁸ Majors also develops a similar strategy (and maybe more convincing than mine): “It is the fact that concepts are what they are partly owing to the character of that world which keeps this view from being incoherent, or unprincipled. On such a conception, to take just one example, if it is a truth about the concept *bachelor* that it applies only to entities in the extension of the concept *unmarried male*, then it is equally a necessary feature – at the level of reference, rather than of sense – that bachelors are necessarily unmarried males” (2009, 49).

⁹⁹ This thesis could take different shapes. One possibility would be to argue, as Shafer-Landau does, that normative properties are realized by non-normative properties. Another possibility would be to argue, as Scanlon does, that normative claims are divided in two categories: mixed and pure. Mixed normative claims are normative claims that are also about the natural, while pure normative claims are claims that are strictly about the normative. According to Scanlon, the truth of mixed normative claims depends on some natural facts (or on some non-normative facts), and on which natural facts they depend is determined by pure normative claims that themselves do not, by definition, vary. Because the truth of pure normative claims does not vary, identical actions in their natural/non-normative features cannot both be good and not-good at the same time. I will say more about Scanlon’s view in section 3.6.2.

(1993c, 146; emphasis in the original): “A quasi-realist will see both covariance and the asymmetry of dependency as a reflection of the fact that valuing is to *be done* in the light of an object’s natural properties, and without that constraint nothing recognizably ethical could be approached at all”. In other words, mixed worlds could be banned by the fact that our moral concepts constitutively aim at the truth, and that this feature represents a conceptual constraint on our moralizing. Hence, moralizing properly would imply banning mixed worlds. If someone fails to respect the constraint of supervenience, she is committing a mistake and she would be doing bad moralizing; although I doubt that non-naturalists will say this is a *moral* mistake. Most likely, they will say that this person is committing a factual mistake.

Even if non-naturalists need to explain how supervenience acts as a conceptual constraint on our moral thinking or theorizing, it might still be possible that Blackburn is wrong in believing that non-naturalists should or do maintain a weak version of supervenience. By maintaining a strong version of supervenience, non-naturalists may believe they have said enough to respond to the worries related to supervenience. However, as we will see in the section 2.3.3, maintaining a stronger understanding of supervenience does also put non-naturalists into trouble, as they do not seem to have any explanation of the fact that the normative properties are necessarily connected with the non-normative properties.

2.3.2.1. Second Reply

The second line of reply is more defensive than the first: it tries to undercut Blackburn’s challenge by arguing that realists other than non-naturalists should also be concerned by it. And, if this is the case, then non-naturalists do not have to be specially bothered by this problem. The idea behind such a reply is that a problem that concerns all realists in equal measure cannot be of *specific* concern for non-naturalists. Indeed, if x is a problem for all realists in equal measure,

why should we believe that x is first and foremost a problem for a subgroup of them, or that x counts as a reason to reject a specific version of realism?¹⁰⁰ Although this is not the strongest possible reply to Blackburn's problem, non-naturalists could say that they do not have to be specifically concerned by the problem of supervenience, insofar as it is a problem for all. But is it a problem for all realists?

It is not necessary to go deep into the details of other normative realist theories to say how Blackburn's problem of supervenience will also concern them. Indeed, because (N) is not – and cannot be – a conceptual truth according to Blackburn, all realists (i.e. non-naturalists and naturalists, reductionists and non-reductionists) will have to explain how they can ban mixed worlds, and they will have to acknowledge somehow that it is not a *conceptual* truth that a set of naturalistic propositions entails a normative proposition. First, let me recall that Blackburn understands (N) in the following way, and that he denies that (N) can be conceptually true¹⁰¹ (1993c, 131):

$$(N) \ N (\forall x)(G^*x \supset Fx)$$

Hence, insofar as (S) and (P) are understood as conceptual claims (as Blackburn want them to be understood), and insofar as the combination (S)/(P) continues to hold, even reductionist naturalists could not say that mixed worlds are banned. Indeed, Blackburn will most likely say

¹⁰⁰ An instance of this kind of strategy can be found in Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's "Moral Fixed Points: New Directions for Moral Nonnaturalism". Indeed, they argue that they do not necessarily have to answer the question "Why should we care about morality?", because – among other reasons – it is a question that all forms of moral realism have to answer. As they say: "Naturalists as well as nonnaturalists face this difficulty, in equal measure. And while regarding some substantive moral norms as a species of conceptual truth might not specially aid us in explaining the reason-giving power of moral facts, neither does it make our version of realism any the less apt to offer such an explanation, whatever it may be" (2014, 407). Of course, for this strategy to work, it is very important that naturalists and non-naturalists face the difficulty *in equal measure*. Otherwise, it could be the case that a problem is a problem for all realists, but a greater one for a subgroup of them.

¹⁰¹ Claiming otherwise would mean that the combination (S)/(P) cannot be instantiated anymore, since (P) and (N) cannot both be true.

that they cannot appeal to (N) to explain how mixed worlds are banned, because maintaining (N) as a conceptual necessity would be, as Blackburn states, “unwise” (1993c, 137).

Also, non-reductionist naturalists will be as much in trouble as non-naturalists are, since what really distinguishes the two theories is the idea that, for non-naturalists, normative properties are metaphysically *sui generis*.¹⁰² This commitment to *sui generis* properties, however, plays no part in Blackburn’s problem. Indeed, it would not be enough to say that, as all natural properties supervene upon the properties of fundamental physics, then natural moral properties also supervene upon the properties of fundamental physics. This would not be enough as this is a metaphysical claim, and this is not enough – at least according to Blackburn – to maintain that (N) is conceptually true and that it is conceptually necessary that a set of natural propositions entail a moral proposition. Hence, not only non-naturalists, but all normative realists are concerned by the problem of supervenience in equal measure, as it is not possible to maintain that (N) is conceptually necessary. This alone, I think, could justify non-naturalists’ refusal to admit that they must be especially concerned by this problem. Indeed, about the problem of supervenience as understood by Blackburn, non-naturalists could say that their view is not worse off than any other plausible realist views. If this is the case, why should they stop maintaining their own view? Hence, I take this to suggest that Blackburn’s problem fails to introduce a problem specific to non-naturalism. The reason why this is so is that Blackburn’s problem does not consider what defines non-naturalism compare to other normative realists: a commitment to *sui generis* normative properties.

¹⁰² This, obviously, does not mean that a commitment to normative properties as being *sui generis* does not make it harder to introduce a satisfying answer to Blackburn’s problem of supervenience.

Of course, at this stage, Blackburn could reply that the problem of supervenience is a reason to abandon normative realism *tout court*, not only non-naturalism; but if this is so then Blackburn's version of the problem of supervenience fails to be a problem specifically for non-naturalists. If the problem of supervenience fails to be a problem specifically for non-naturalists, then we have failed to introduce a reason to reject non-naturalism itself, rather than a reason to reject normative realism in general. This is a dialectical issue more than anything else, but if the point is to show, as I think it should be, that non-naturalists are specifically in metaphysical trouble, then Blackburn's version of the problem has failed to achieve this. I shall argue, in the next section, that McPherson's understanding of the problem of supervenience achieves what Blackburn's understanding fails to achieve.

2.3.3. McPherson's Understanding of the Problem of Supervenience

The goal of the sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 was, first, to introduce Blackburn's understanding of the problem of supervenience, and, second, to argue that this specific understanding of the problem is not the best way to understand the problem of supervenience *as* a problem for non-naturalists. In this section, I will introduce another understanding of the problem of supervenience, as put forward by Tristram McPherson in "Ethical Non-Naturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience", a paper published in 2012.¹⁰³ I believe that this specific understanding of the problem of supervenience is actually worrisome for non-naturalists, as it is grounded in the

¹⁰³ Mark Schroeder also refers to a problem regarding supervenience that is quite similar to McPherson's problem, although Schroeder does not direct this problem at non-naturalists, but at non-reductionists. The basics of Schroeder's problem of supervenience are the same as McPherson's: necessities require explanation. Nevertheless, I prefer to go with McPherson's version of the problem of supervenience since it directly target non-naturalism, and since it represents a more complete problem. For more on Schroeder's understanding of the problem of supervenience for non-reductionists, see (Schroeder 2007, 70–71, 2014, 125–28).

strong understanding of the relation of supervenience between normative and non-normative properties that non-naturalists most likely maintain and in other principles hard to deny.

McPherson's problem of supervenience rests on three claims. I will first state these claims, then explain them. The three claims are the following (McPherson 2012, 217):¹⁰⁴

SUPERVENIENCE: No metaphysically possible world that is identical to a second world in all base respects can be different from the second world in its normative respects.

BRUTE CONNECTION: The non-naturalist must take the supervenience of the normative properties on the base properties to involve a brute necessary connection between discontinuous properties.¹⁰⁵

MODEST HUMEAN: Commitment to brute necessary connections between discontinuous properties counts significantly against a view.

For McPherson, the formula of supervenience must satisfy two desiderata. The first is that it must represent something that metaethicists arguing for different views (e.g. naturalism, non-naturalism, expressivism, etc.) could all maintain (2015, 210), but the most important thing is for SUPERVENIENCE to be consistent with non-naturalism.

Because of how McPherson defines the notion of "base property", SUPERVENIENCE should be common ground between – at least – normative realists, if not also between most metaethicists. For McPherson, a base property is any property that is neither a *sui generis* normative property, nor a property for which "its real definition ineliminably mentions *sui generis* [normative] properties" (2015, 213). SUPERVENIENCE should then be maintained by non-naturalists, considering it expresses what they usually claim: that normative properties supervene

¹⁰⁴ I recall that McPherson is actually talking about *ethical* non-naturalism. Because I think the metaphysical issue arises not only for ethical non-naturalists, but for normative non-naturalists in general, I have replaced McPherson's use of the term "ethical" by the term "normative".

¹⁰⁵ Maybe a similar claim could also hold for normative naturalists, more specifically non-reductionist naturalists. However, even if a problem of supervenience could also be true for naturalists, it is important to note that it will not be as troublesome as it is for non-naturalists. The reason why is that, while non-naturalists are committed to normative properties being *sui generis*, naturalists are not. Hence, even if we could say that the connection between normative and non-normative properties is necessary according to naturalists, it is not a necessary connection between discontinuous entities. This last point is what makes the issue so problematic for non-naturalists.

on a class of distinct properties (which is simply called here the “base properties”¹⁰⁶). However, if naturalist realism is true, then normative properties are not *sui generis* properties. Indeed, whether reductionist or non-reductionist naturalism is true, in both cases normative properties are metaphysically *continuous* with natural properties. Hence, naturalists could also accept SUPERVENIENCE, and they would even be able to explain it trivially: no metaphysically possible world that is identical to another world in all base respects can be different from this other world in normative respects because normative properties, naturalist realists would tell us, are part of the base properties (this holds insofar as we keep McPherson’s definition of “base properties” fixed). Hence, there is no surprise that two worlds identical in all base respects will be identical in normative respects. Of course, it would be necessary to say more in order to establish that SUPERVENIENCE is really common ground within – at least – normative realists, but what has been said should be sufficient for the actual purpose.

The second desideratum is that the formula of supervenience must “be strong enough to star in the central argument against non-naturalism” (2015, 210). It is not completely clear what “strong enough” means, but we might assume that McPherson has in mind a situation where the specific formula of supervenience could simply be trivially explained by non-naturalists. Also, by “strong enough”, McPherson seems to mean “of the right strength”. In order to show that SUPERVENIENCE is of the right strength, McPherson argues that SUPERVENIENCE is “modest” on four important points (2015, 214–16). First, SUPERVENIENCE does not specify a subset of

¹⁰⁶ The reason why McPherson is identifying the properties upon which normative properties supervene as being the “base properties” is to respond to an objection introduced by Nicholas Sturgeon. According to this objection, there is no “neutral”, “universally acknowledged”, definition or understanding of the properties upon which normative (or moral) properties supervene (Sturgeon 2009, 57). This makes introducing a formulation of the principle of supervenience that could take a central role in a problem difficult. I am following McPherson’s response to this objection here, although Michael Ridge has also offered a response that could work (2007). Indeed, Ridge defines disjunctively the properties upon which the normative properties supervene: normative properties either supervene upon non-normative properties or descriptive properties.

properties – other than “base properties” – upon which normative properties supervene. Trying to specify upon which base properties normative properties supervene risks jeopardizing the common ground SUPERVENIENCE is trying to represent. Second, SUPERVENIENCE is purely a metaphysical claim, and it says nothing about the possibility for it to be analytic or true *a priori*; something that is rather contentious and that some metaethicists may prefer to reject. Third, SUPERVENIENCE is non-symmetric, which means (as explained in section 2.1) that it is neither symmetric nor asymmetric. This is important for SUPERVENIENCE to be common ground. Being non-symmetric, SUPERVENIENCE does not have to relate distinct properties. Otherwise, and to give only one example, reductionist naturalists would not be able to maintain SUPERVENIENCE, since they would not agree that normative properties are distinct from the base properties. Fourth, SUPERVENIENCE is modest in the sense that the thesis itself is not explanatory, and nothing suggests that it has (or must have) explanatory power.

Before moving on to our discussion of BRUTE CONNECTION, I think it is important to discuss one last thing about McPherson’s specific formulation of SUPERVENIENCE. Indeed, it is important to stress that SUPERVENIENCE is a *global* supervenience claim. As McPherson says: “it is a claim about the possible structure of whole worlds, not of the relationships between properties of individuals” (2012, 211). Another formulation of a global supervenience claim for the ethical (or normative) case is the following (McPherson 2015, section 1.2; emphasis in the original):

Global Supervenience: For any [possible] worlds w_1 and w_2 , if w_1 and w_2 have exactly the same world-wide pattern of distribution of *base* properties, then they have exactly the same world-wide pattern of distribution of ethical properties.

This second formulation of global supervenience is somewhat clearer than SUPERVENIENCE since it states what it means for a world to be identical to another in all base respects: for w_1 to be

identical to w_2 , both worlds must have the “exactly the same world-wide pattern of distribution of base properties”.

A potential issue with global supervenience is that, at least according to many, it is usually understood as allowing *intra*world variations: individuals within a possible world may differ in their *A*-properties (e.g. normative properties) without differing in their *B*-properties (e.g. non-normative properties), although w_1 and w_2 themselves cannot differ in their *A*-properties without differing in their *B*-properties (Bennett 2004, 511–14; Leuenberger 2009, 120; McLaughlin and Bennett 2014, section 4.3.5; Shagrir 1999, 2013). In other words, that means that, if global supervenience does allow for intraworld variations, then the individuals S_1 and S_2 (both in w_1) could be non-normatively identical but normatively different. However, some may say that the intuitions supporting a supervenience relation in the normative case do not allow for such intraworld variations. Indeed, as we do not seem to believe that normative properties can change on their own, we should be suspicious of S_1 and S_2 (both in w_1) being non-normatively identical but normatively different. And McPherson does not seem to believe that this is possible either. Indeed, here is how he explains why so many metaethicists are inclined to maintain normative supervenience (I already introduced McPherson’s justification of supervenience in section 2.2) (2012, 211; underline added for emphasis):

I take ethical supervenience theses to be best motivated by a two-part process. The first stage is to consider particular instances of what they rule out. For example, it seems impossible that another world might be identical to this one except that in that other world, a genocide otherwise identical to the actual Rwandan genocide differed solely in being ethically wonderful, rather than being an atrocity. Cases like this postulate a necessary connection: we seem to have discovered on reflection that the ethical features of the genocide cannot vary independently of its other features. Reflection on such examples thus suggests commitment to a series of ‘specific supervenience facts,’ each of which involves a posited necessary connection.

(For the record, the second stage states that, since there seems to be nothing special about specific supervenience facts, this supports something like a global supervenience claim about the

normative.) In this passage, McPherson uses the notion of a possible world to show that the ethical (or normative) features of a thing cannot vary independently of its other features, but this may not be enough to conclusively support a global supervenience claim. Indeed, the claim that another world could not be identical to our world except that in that world the Rwandan genocide is not something bad could just be a way to express that we seem to be committed to some “specific supervenience facts”, facts that are concerning the relation between individuals and their properties.

However, the fact that McPherson understands this example as suggesting a commitment towards a necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties also seems to suggest that intraworld variations are not something possible in the normative domain. This might be the reason why, in his reformulation of the problem of supervenience, Väyrynen understands SUPERVENIENCE as being a strong *individual* (or local¹⁰⁷) supervenience claim rather than a *global* supervenience claim (2017, 172) (an individual supervenience claim was assumed while discussing Blackburn’s version of the problem of supervenience).¹⁰⁸ Hence, Väyrynen’s formulation of the supervenience relation is the following:

Strong Supervenience: $N (\forall F \text{ in } \alpha) (\forall x) (Fx \supset (\exists G \text{ in } \beta) [Gx \ \& \ N (\forall y) (Gy \supset Fy)])$

To quote Väyrynen, this claim means that “any morally wrong action has some features such that anything else with those features cannot but be wrong as well, and likewise for any other moral [or normative] property” (2017, 173).

¹⁰⁷ I understand “individual supervenience claim” and “local supervenience claim” as being equivalent.

¹⁰⁸ The issue of whether global supervenience entails (strong) individual supervenience is also an important (and live) debate. Most people seem to believe that this is not the case, and I assume here that it is indeed not the case. For more on this, see McLaughlin and Bennett (2014, section 4.3).

Very importantly, I do not think I have to decide right now on whether we should maintain a global supervenience claim or a strong individual supervenience claim for the normative domain, but it is important to bear in mind, while discussing the problem of supervenience, that we are talking – no matter whether we maintain global or individual supervenience – about a *strong* necessary connection between the normative and non-normative properties. It is also important to bear in mind the intuition we are trying to cash out with the relation of supervenience, namely that normative features cannot vary on their own. Whether this intuition is best cashed out by a global supervenience claim or by a strong individual supervenience claim is, I believe, something I can leave unsettled for now.

Nevertheless, it is also important to note that this issue seems to depend on whether we believe that normative properties supervene upon only intrinsic or upon both intrinsic and extrinsic non-normative properties of individuals (assuming for now that normative properties supervene upon the non-normative properties of individuals).¹⁰⁹

Maintaining that normative properties (strongly) supervene upon intrinsic non-normative properties of individuals suggests an (strong) individual supervenience claim,¹¹⁰ while maintaining that normative properties supervene upon intrinsic and extrinsic non-normative properties of individuals suggests a global supervenience claim. Also, intraworld variations could be blocked under the terms of global supervenience if the base properties are understood as

¹⁰⁹ A strong case for why we should maintain a global supervenience claim rather than an individual supervenience claim about the normative can be found in Majors (2009, 36–37). I tend to agree with Majors: an individual supervenience claim about the normative does not appear likely. Although, as many non-naturalists' responses to the problem of supervenience assume an individual supervenience claim about the normative, I prefer to stay impartial on this point.

¹¹⁰ As we have seen in section 2.3.2.1, Moore (and probably Shafer-Landau) maintains that normative properties follow from natural intrinsic properties of things. It is important to note that Moore's position is not strictly speaking inconsistent with a global supervenience claim, as it would be possible to derive it from a strong individual claim. Enoch also prefers to adopt a strong individual supervenience claim, as he believes that if non-naturalists can explain this claim then they could explain all possible supervenience claims, including a global supervenience claim (2011, 136–37).

encompassing both intrinsic and extrinsic properties of individuals. In such a case, every change at the normative level would also be accompanied by a change at the non-normative level, although not necessarily by a change at the level of intrinsic properties of individuals. That is to say that, because of some change at the level of extrinsic properties of an individual (i.e. the context in which this individual is found could change), it is possible for the normative properties of that individual to change.¹¹¹ This is consistent with the idea that normative properties cannot vary on their own, as it means that even individuals indistinguishable in their intrinsic non-normative properties could be distinguishable in their extrinsic non-normative properties.

BRUTE CONNECTION is probably the most controversial claim of the argument. It states that non-naturalists do not have a compelling explanation of the necessary connection between normative and base properties. This is why non-naturalists are committed to a brute connection between normative and base properties; considering they have no proper explanation of this connection, they must leave it unexplained (i.e. they have to see it as being brute). For McPherson, it is the very fact that non-naturalists believe that normative properties are metaphysically discontinuous with the base properties that supports BRUTE CONNECTION. As he claims (2012, 219):

In being committed to [normative] properties being *sui generis* [...], the non-naturalist is committed to them being discontinuous in the sense mentioned in BRUTE CONNECTION [...]. The thought motivating BRUTE CONNECTION is that, in virtue of their being discontinuous in this way, we have prima facie reason to think that there could be no metaphysically satisfying explanation of the necessary connection between them.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Shagrir makes a similar point, although not about normative properties (2013, 481): “But there is another understanding of intraworld variation according to which two objects can be distinguishable in their A-properties even if they are indistinguishable in their intrinsic B-properties. This interpretation of intraworld variance is consistent with SGS [strong global supervenience]: if SGS holds, then the two objects will be distinguishable in their extrinsic B-properties”.

¹¹² Maybe a similar point is true about *non-reductionist naturalist*, but for sure it is not true for *reductionist naturalist*. Although, it is important to note that the *exact same point* cannot be true for non-reductionist naturalist, as non-reductionist naturalists are not committed to *sui generis* or *discontinuous* normative properties. Whether non-reductionist naturalists are also committed to a brute necessary connection between normative and non-normative

Of course, the reason to believe that there could be no compelling metaphysical explanation of the necessary connection between normative and base properties will stay a *prima facie* reason until we have discussed the potential explanations non-naturalists may have.¹¹³

More needs to be said about the third and last claim of the problem. According to MODEST HUMEAN, a commitment to a brute necessary connection between discontinuous entities counts significantly against a view as we should, as far as possible, avoid postulating connections between discontinuous entities that we cannot explain (in this context, “being brute” means “not explained”, and if no compelling explanation is available, “unexplainable”). I understand the following claim as supporting MODEST HUMEAN: necessary connections between discontinuous entities are hard to believe, and we should be even more specifically suspicious of them if they cannot be explained. If they cannot be explained, I think it is fair to characterize these necessary connections as being mysterious. In other words, the fact that they cannot be explained will make them difficult, or maybe even impossible, to understand.

MODEST HUMEAN is, to use McPherson’s expression, a “methodological cousin” of Hume’s Dictum, a metaphysical thesis attributed to David Hume.¹¹⁴ McPherson understands Hume’s Dictum as being the following claim: “there are no metaphysically necessary connections between distinct entities” (2012, 217).¹¹⁵ While Hume’s Dictum states explicitly that

properties is a question I will leave aside, but it is important to stress again that the problem of supervenience cannot be as troublesome for non-reductionist naturalists as it is for non-naturalists.

¹¹³ Here is not the right place to establish the claim that the necessary connection between normative and base properties is in fact brute; this is the topic of the next chapter, in which potential explanations of this connection will be assessed.

¹¹⁴ “There is no object, which implies the existence of any other if we consider these objects in themselves” (Hume 1739, Book I, Part III).

¹¹⁵ Jessica Wilson, in a paper about Hume’s Dictum and the reasons to believe it, defines it in a very similar way: “there are no metaphysically necessary connections between distinct, intrinsically typed, entities” (2010, 595). By an entity being “intrinsically typed”, Wilson means for an entity “to be typed solely in terms of intrinsic properties” (2010, 610).

there are no metaphysically necessary connections between distinct entities,¹¹⁶ MODEST HUMEAN merely states that a *brute* metaphysically necessary connection counts significantly against a view; it does not state that such a necessary connection is impossible, but that, if it is left unexplained, it counts against a view. In the following paragraphs, I shall explain in greater detail the differences between MODEST HUMEAN and Hume's Dictum,¹¹⁷ and I shall try to give support to the idea that a brute necessary connection counts significantly against a view.

The goal of this discussion is not to assess Hume's Dictum,¹¹⁸ but to introduce the doubts that McPherson states against it, which should help us to grasp the strength of MODEST HUMEAN. McPherson introduces the two following reasons to be suspicious of Hume's Dictum. First, we might not be confident in our capacity to identify entities as being distinct in such a way that makes the Dictum both true and interesting. This is important because many properties seem both non-identical and necessarily connected. McPherson gives the example of the property of being scarlet and the property of being red (2012, 218). They seem non-identical: we could have an instantiation of the property of being red without having an instantiation of the property of being scarlet. Also, by saying that an object *o* is scarlet, we are attributing something different to *o* than if we were only saying that it is red. However, the property of being red seems necessarily connected to the property of being scarlet: each time we have an instantiation of the property of being scarlet, we also have, necessarily, an instantiation of the property of being red. Hence, it appears that if we were strictly following Hume's Dictum, either we would have to say that the property of being scarlet and the property of being red are not non-identical, or we would have to

¹¹⁶ Hume applies the dictum to objects, while McPherson and Wilson apply it to "entities" in general. There is a legitimate issue whether a property can count as an "entity", but I will follow people that apply Hume's Dictum to properties and assume that a property is indeed an entity.

¹¹⁷ I should also stress that it does not matter for my purpose to determine whether Hume's Dictum is true.

¹¹⁸ For an insightful assessment of it, see Wilson (2010). Olson also provides an interesting overview of the reasons to be sceptical of Hume's Dictum available in the literature (2014, 92–95).

say that the properties are not necessarily connected. There might be a way to argue that these two properties are in fact not distinct, but we may also doubt our capacity to identify it; and this is exactly one of the reasons why we could doubt the truth of Hume's Dictum.

The second reason to doubt the truth of Hume's Dictum is that we might believe that the Dictum alone is not sufficient to rule out a view. Indeed, Hume's Dictum seems to mainly rely on *intuitions* about what is metaphysically plausible and implausible, and those intuitions alone may not be sufficient to ground the truthfulness of the Dictum, *and* those intuitions alone may not be sufficient to justify rejecting a view (McPherson 2012, 218). Maybe the right thing to do, if we believe that the property of being scarlet and the property of being red are non-identical and necessarily connected, would be to drop the intuitions supporting Hume's Dictum.¹¹⁹

For McPherson, trying to accommodate these two reasons is actually what makes MODEST HUMEAN modest (and appealing). Two elements address the first reason. The first is that, rather than diving into a difficult discussion of what makes two things distinct, MODEST HUMEAN follows the same criterion used to characterize non-naturalists' commitment to there being *sui generis* normative properties. The idea, I recall, is that normative properties are *sui generis* only if they are neither reducible to any other categories of properties nor metaphysically continuous with any other categories of properties. Following this criterion is modest, at least for McPherson's purpose, because it represents something that non-naturalists (should) already accept. The second element is that MODEST HUMEAN only applies to brute necessary connections, while Hume's Dictum applies to all necessary connections. Hence, if a specific necessary connection appears to be brute at first sight, but it turns out that we can provide a

¹¹⁹ I acknowledge that this discussion of Hume's Dictum is very reductive. Going into the details of this debate would just take us too far from the problem of supervenience.

compelling explanation of it, then MODEST HUMEAN would have been satisfied. As McPherson explains (2012, 218):

Thus, if two properties are discontinuous, but we are nonetheless able to offer a compelling explanation of the necessary connection between them, MODEST HUMEAN makes the reasonable suggestion that having made such a connection intelligible would be enough to defeat the Humean presumption.

This is a very important point: MODEST HUMEAN is not claiming that every necessary connection between distinct entities is suspicious, only that a brute necessary connection is.

To use again the examples of the properties of being scarlet and of being red, if there is a necessary connection between these two properties, and if we have a compelling explanation of this necessary connection,¹²⁰ then no humean presumption should be raised against it. This is so insofar as we maintain MODEST HUMEAN; if instead we maintain Hume's Dictum, then if there is a necessary connection between being scarlet and being red, we should consider this connection as being suspicious and any view that is committed to it should be rejected.¹²¹ However, this relies, as I have previously explained, on an intuition that might be *prima facie* justified, but not *all things considered* justified. And the idea that the intuition backing up Hume's Dictum could be rejected could represent an easy way out of the problem of supervenience for non-naturalists. Being less ambitious than Hume's Dictum, MODEST HUMEAN could not be as easily tossed away by non-naturalists, because, presumably, MODEST HUMEAN does not force us to deny a lot of things we may believe to be true (e.g. the necessary connection between being scarlet and being red), while Hume's Dictum does seem to force us to do so. MODEST HUMEAN is more modest

¹²⁰ There is of course a huge debate regarding what "a compelling explanation" means. Regarding the problem of supervenience for non-naturalism, I will have to say a few things, in section 3.1, about what such an explanation of the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties should look like.

¹²¹ I am following McPherson here, but this point is most likely too quick. Indeed, someone could say that there is a determinate-determinable relation between scarlet and red, and that it gives us some account of the necessary connection between these two properties. Someone could also say that this proves that Hume's Dictum is covering too much ground, as even the necessary relation between scarlet and red would have to be rejected. I see that as counting in favor of MODEST HUMEAN over Hume's Dictum.

than Hume's Dictum first because it only concerns unexplained necessary connections, and second because it only concerns necessary connections between discontinuous entities.

Regarding the second concern McPherson introduces against Hume's Dictum, MODEST HUMEAN only implies that positing a brute necessary connection counts significantly against a view. Indeed, a brute necessary connection should not be understood as being a conclusive reason to reject a view. For instance, it might be the case that, after all, we should believe in non-naturalism even if it posits a brute necessary connection between distinct entities: it might indeed be the case that non-naturalism is the only view that can explain a specific feature of the normative phenomenon, and we could believe that explaining this other feature counts significantly for non-naturalism regardless of the problem of supervenience. This is why MODEST HUMEAN is also very compelling: it introduces a reason to doubt a view, but it does not introduce a *conclusive* reason to doubt it. Hence, the proponents of that view cannot just appeal to the idea that the problem is just too strong to be true.

From now on, unless specified otherwise, by "the problem of supervenience" I will always refer to McPherson's understanding of the problem of supervenience, which I see as being the best expression of the metaphysical issue regarding supervenience that non-naturalists are facing. I believe this is so because McPherson appeals to claims that non-naturalists either already maintain or should maintain, and to claims that are also very intuitive.

In section 2.3.5, I will explain the different strategies non-naturalists could use to respond to McPherson, and Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 will consist in an exploration of these strategies. In section 2.3.4, I will assess a challenge to MODEST HUMEAN advanced by Erik Wielenberg. It is important to discuss this challenge right now, because if Wielenberg is right – although I will argue that he is not – MODEST HUMEAN would somehow be self-undermining. If MODEST

HUMEAN is self-undermining, then McPherson's problem of supervenience is, obviously, not real. However, I will argue that MODEST HUMEAN is not self-undermining, and that the problem of supervenience is real.

2.3.4. Wielenberg's Challenge to MODEST HUMEAN

Even if most non-naturalists' replies to the problem of supervenience consist in a rejection of BRUTE CONNECTION, it is important to point out right now that the problem could also be solved by either rejecting SUPERVENIENCE¹²² or MODEST HUMEAN. Indeed, it may not be required to explain why the necessary connection between normative and base properties is not brute to answer the problem of supervenience; doing so is only one option amongst many. Wielenberg argues, first, that non-naturalists (or "robust realists", as he prefers) could deny BRUTE CONNECTION. They could do so because he believes that the necessary connection between the normative and base properties can be explained by a "making" relation that holds between the base (or non-normative) and normative properties. I will discuss further Wielenberg's understanding of this making relation and whether it could successfully explain the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties in section 3.5.2; what I would like to discuss in this section is what Wielenberg says about MODEST HUMEAN, and how he believes non-naturalists could reject this claim.

¹²² The possibility for non-naturalists to deny SUPERVENIENCE is the topic of the fourth chapter.

Wielenberg's main point is that MODEST HUMEAN is self-undermining as it posits itself a necessary connection between two discontinuous properties (2014, 33–34):

P1: entailing a brute necessary connection between discontinuous properties.

P2: being *prima facie* epistemically unjustified.¹²³

P1 is a logical property, and P2 an epistemological one. On the face of it, as Wielenberg says, P1 and P2 seem discontinuous. Indeed, they seem to be distinct, and it is far from obvious that one is reducible to the other or continuous with the other. McPherson, Wielenberg explains, also holds that there is a necessary connection between P1 and P2. Why? Because, for the problem of supervenience to hold, it is necessary that everything that has P1 has P2. Indeed, it seems to be the case that everything that entails a brute necessary connection between discontinuous properties is also *prima facie* epistemically unjustified (because entailing a brute necessary connection between discontinuous properties counts against a view).

The problem, according to Wielenberg, is that McPherson does not provide an account of this necessary connection between P1 and P2. Hence, we should maintain that the connection between P1 and P2 is brute as it is left unexplained by McPherson. This is the reason why, for Wielenberg, MODEST HUMEAN is self-undermining. As he explains: “[MODEST HUMEAN] implies that [MODEST HUMEAN] makes a commitment that counts significantly against its own truth, since [MODEST HUMEAN] itself makes a commitment to the existence of a brute necessary connection between discontinuous properties” (2014, 34). If Wielenberg is right, then we should say that MODEST HUMEAN cannot be used to undermine non-naturalism. In fact, we should not

¹²³ The specific formulation of P2 does not seem to matter too much to Wielenberg, as he adds “or something similar” right after having introduced it. What matters is that P2 is an epistemological property, while P1 is a logical property.

use a self-undermining principle or premise to reject any view. Hence, non-naturalists should not be worried by the problem of supervenience, as it relies on a principle that is self-undermining.

I think there are three lines of reply we could pursue to respond to Wielenberg's argument: (i) arguing that P1 and P2 are not discontinuous properties; (ii) denying that the connection between P1 and P2 is brute; (iii) maintaining that the relation between P1 and P2 is not necessary. I will assess each line of reply. Before doing so, let me lay my cards on the table: I think Wielenberg's challenge to MODEST HUMEAN is unsuccessful, but I am only convinced by the third line of reply.

(i) Even if P1 is a logical property and P2 an epistemological property, it might be possible to argue that P1 and P2 are not discontinuous properties. Indeed, following McPherson's definition of metaphysical *continuity*, it is not obvious (or not to me, anyway) that we need to maintain that P1 and P2 are discontinuous properties (although we could believe that they are *distinct* properties). For instance, we might believe that both P1's nature and P2's nature have to be understood in terms of what we are *prima facie* allowed or permitted to believe (or to accept, sustain, maintain, etc.).¹²⁴ If this is so, in order to understand what it is for a property to be a *logical* property, we would need to make reference to what we are allowed or permitted to believe, and, in order to understand what it is for a property to be an *epistemological* property, we would also need to make reference to what we are allowed or permitted to believe. This would make logical and epistemological properties metaphysically continuous; and this would be so because *x* is metaphysically continuous with *y* if the terms used to understand *y*'s nature can

¹²⁴ Proving this point, mainly about logical properties, might be very arduous, and I will not attempt to do so here. Nevertheless, I think that it could be done if it could be argued that we are not allowed to believe what is illogical (i.e. that to believe what is illogical is not epistemically permissible). The whole point of this discussion is to suggest that it is not obvious that logical and epistemological properties are metaphysically *discontinuous*, that they could rather be intertwined and hence metaphysically continuous.

also be used to understand x 's nature. If P2's nature can be understood in terms of P1's nature (or vice versa), then P1 and P2 are metaphysically continuous; and if P1 and P2 are metaphysically continuous, the fact that there is a necessary connection between P1 and P2 (even brute) cannot undermine MODEST HUMEAN's truth, since this principle only concerns necessary connections between *discontinuous* properties. This alone might represent a satisfactory reply to Wielenberg's argument.¹²⁵

(ii) According to the second line of reply, we could grant that P1 and P2 are discontinuous properties, but deny that the necessary connection between these two properties is brute. If the connection between P1 and P2 is explained, then it will not count against MODEST HUMEAN since this principle can only be applied to *brute* necessary connections between discontinuous entities. For Wielenberg, it seems to be the case that the connection between P1 and P2 is brute because MODEST HUMEAN mainly relies on intuitive ground. However, I think that saying that MODEST HUMEAN's ground is only intuitive is unreasonable. In my opinion, MODEST HUMEAN relies, among other things, on the fact that if we can avoid seeing a relation as brute, we should do so. Otherwise put, MODEST HUMEAN relies on the idea that it is "epistemically desirable" to avoid postulating a brute necessary connection; that is to say, if we could avoid seeing that relation as brute, it is epistemically desirable to avoid seeing it as brute.

In order to support the idea that MODEST HUMEAN's ground is not only mainly intuitive, we can be a little bit more specific and say that it is a token of the following – very compelling – epistemological principle: if we are assessing a view A , and A implies a thing x (and we have good reasons to believe that x is the case) that cannot be explained in A 's terms, and we could accept another view B that has an explanation of x , we should – *all things being equal* – accept B

¹²⁵ Obviously, this line of reply would be persuasive only if it could be convincingly argued that logical and epistemological properties are metaphysically continuous.

rather than *A* (i.e. we should accept the view that can explain *x* rather than the view that cannot). Otherwise put, this principle is stating that we should accept the theory that has the greater explanatory power of things that we consider necessary to be explained;¹²⁶ and we should accept this principle because explaining things is, after all, what theories are about. This is more than a mere intuition, it seems rather to point to something essential to what it is for something to be a theory. MODEST HUMEAN would then be explained and supported on more than mere intuitive grounds, and it might very well be the case, by the same token, that the relation between P1 and P2 is not brute.

Furthermore, not only can we say – or so I argue – that the relation between P1 and P2 is not brute, we *can* also avoid seeing the relation between normative and base properties as brute. For the sake of the argument, let us assume that there are only two metaethical theories available to us: non-naturalist realism and naturalist realism. Let us also assume that naturalist realists have a good enough explanation of the relation of supervenience; moreover, naturalist realists are not committed to a relation between discontinuous properties, because they do not maintain that normative properties are *sui generis*. Hence, given those assumptions, if we were to believe in naturalist realism, we would have an answer to the problem of supervenience. Let us also assume that non-naturalists do not have an explanation of the relation of supervenience; therefore, they are committed to seeing the necessary connection posited by supervenience as being brute. All things being equal, naturalists have an advantage over non-naturalists: they can explain

¹²⁶ This is why the “all things being equal” in the formulation of the principle is essential. Applied to metaethical views, *B* would have a greater explanatory power than *A* if, let us assume, there are only three things that a metaethical view should explain: *x*, *y*, and *z*. Let us also assume that both *A* and *B* each have equally compelling explanations for *y* and *z*. The only thing that differentiates the explanatory power of *A* from the explanatory power of *B* is that *B* has a good explanation of *x* while *A* has no explanation of *x*. In this case, I think it is justified to say that *B* has a greater explanatory power than *A*. In this case, if the only metaethical views available are *A* and *B*, I think it would be epistemically unjustified to maintain *A* over *B*; indeed, all things being equal, we *should* maintain *B* in this case.

something that – we assume – is the case, that we should explain, and that non-naturalists cannot explain. MODEST HUMEAN is then telling us that the fact that non-naturalists are committed to a brute necessary connection counts significantly against that view, and this is obviously even more compelling when there exists another option (e.g. naturalist realism) that does not imply a brute necessary connection between discontinuous entities.

(iii) The third line of reply to Wielenberg's argument, and maybe the most convincing one, challenges the idea that the relation between P1 and P2 is necessary. If the relation between P1 and P2 is not necessary, it is contingent; it might indeed depend on some contingent facts regarding the literature of a domain, or some contingent facts about the kind of views proposed in a specific domain (in our case, the domain of metaethical views). One of these contingent facts is whether at least one other option than (in our case) the non-naturalists' commitment to a brute necessary connection between discontinuous entities is offered. If yes, and because I believe that the relation between P1 and P2 is contingent, then this relation holds, and it is then the case that it counts against a view that it posits a brute necessary connection between discontinuous entities.

To use the same example as in (ii), it could be the case that naturalist realists have an explanation of the relation of supervenience and that this explanation is roughly good (whatever it is).¹²⁷ In this case, the fact that non-naturalists' are committed to a brute necessary connection *does* count against this view. But, we should say, this counts against this view only because naturalists have an explanation of the relation of supervenience that does not imply a brute necessary connection between discontinuous entities. The relation between P1 and P2 holds, but

¹²⁷ And, in any case, it is important to recall that, because naturalists maintain that normative properties are natural, they do not agree that the former are discontinuous with the latter.

only contingently: in this specific scenario, it is contingent on the fact that naturalists have a roughly good explanation of supervenience.

If, let us assume further, no metaethicist believes in naturalist realism, and no one argues for a roughly good explanation of supervenience, then I do not think we would be entitled to say that the relation between P1 and P2 holds. In this kind of world (which is not the world in which non-naturalists are living, because some people are arguing for a wide range of metaethical views, including naturalism), it might very well be the case that *it is not the case* that implying a brute necessary connection between discontinuous entities counts significantly against a view.

This is (partly) so because of how we ought to understand the notion of “counting significantly against a view”, which can only be understood in terms of comparing one view to another. If there is no other view to which a given view could be compared, it would not be the case that we can say that x counts against a view. Indeed, we can say that x counts against the view A only because a view B is able to account for x , while A cannot. If there is no view B (and no other view at all), then I do not think we can be justified in saying that x counts against A .¹²⁸ Hence, I do not think we need to agree that the relation between P1 and P2 holds necessarily, mainly because I think that this relation is instantiated only when some contingent facts obtain. If it holds only contingently, then it is beyond MODEST HUMEAN’s scope; and this means that MODEST HUMEAN is not self-undermining.

¹²⁸ Moreover, I do not think we could argue that it is necessary that, if we have a view A , then we also have a view B . There might be a possible world in which there is only one metaethical view.

2.3.5. *How Should We Deal with the Problem of Supervenience?*

I think there are two broad strategies we could take to deal with the problem of supervenience, insofar as we take this problem seriously.¹²⁹ The first strategy, which I am understanding as a direct reply to this problem (hence the use of the term “direct strategy”), consists in denying BRUTE CONNECTION. To follow this strategy, non-naturalists have to account for the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties. In other words, in order to introduce a direct reply to the problem of supervenience, non-naturalists should try to explain the necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative. In the next chapter, my aim is to assess the different accounts introduced by non-naturalists.

The second strategy, that I am understanding as an indirect reply to the problem (hence the use of the term “indirect strategy”), consists in either denying SUPERVENIENCE or MODEST HUMEAN. As I expressed a few times, and as I stress again now, we need to acknowledge that our intuitions supporting supervenience only represent, at best, a *pro tanto* justification. We might very well conclude that, after all, the commitment to SUPERVENIENCE is unnecessary or unjustified. If non-naturalists do not have to maintain SUPERVENIENCE, they may not be committed to a brute necessary connection between discontinuous entities. Furthermore, how exactly we should understand the supervenience relation in the normative case is still an open question, as we have seen in section 2.3.3. Depending how the supervenience claim is understood (i.e., as a global supervenience or as a strong individual claim), non-naturalists may have some resources to deal with the problem of supervenience. Also, as Wielenberg tries to do,

¹²⁹ Obviously, it is possible to deal with the problem of supervenience by trying to “dissolve” it, that is to say by trying to show that this is not a real problem for non-naturalists. This is probably a plausible reply, but except by showing that MODEST HUMEAN is false, I do not see how this kind of reply could be convincing. I will have more to say in the conclusion about the possibility to say that the problem of supervenience may not be a real problem for non-naturalists, but from now on I will assume that the replies discussed in the next two chapters really try to interact with the two other premises of the problem.

non-naturalists could challenge MODEST HUMEAN. This strategy does not seem very popular in the literature, but denying MODEST HUMEAN is, despite what I have said to support it, a possibility. However, as Wielenberg seems to be the only one ready to deny MODEST HUMEAN, and as I do not think what he says against this claim is convincing, I will assume in the fourth and final chapter that the only interesting way to develop an indirect reply to the problem of supervenience is by denying SUPERVENIENCE.

Chapter 3: Direct Replies to the Problem of Supervenience

The goal of this chapter is to assess a category of replies to the problem of supervenience that I call “direct replies”. These replies all share the feature of trying to respond to the problem of supervenience, as formulated in the previous chapter, by denying BRUTE CONNECTION. The only way to deny BRUTE CONNECTION, or at least the most obvious way to do so, is by explaining the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties. Indeed, to argue that this necessary connection is not brute, it is essential to explain it.¹³⁰

Even if the core of a direct reply to the problem of supervenience is a denial of BRUTE CONNECTION, this claim could be attacked from many angles. Some non-naturalists believe that we could reject BRUTE CONNECTION because there exists a metaphysical relation between the normative and non-normative properties that explain why these properties are necessarily connected, others because there are some fundamental normative truths or principles that explain why the normative and non-normative are necessarily connected, others still because the supervenience relation can be explained as a conceptual truth, and so on. For each direct reply, my conclusion is the same: it fails to provide a satisfactory explanation of the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties, and hence it fails to provide a proper rejection of BRUTE CONNECTION. The point of this chapter, besides introducing as many direct replies as possible, is to argue for this conclusion. Importantly, and I will say more about this in section 3.1, I will not consider an attempt to argue that there is no real problem for non-naturalist realists as being a direct reply to the problem of supervenience. It is obviously possible to argue that the problem of supervenience is not a real problem for non-naturalists, maybe by

¹³⁰ To make it clear once again, I do not think this is the only way to respond to the problem of supervenience, but direct replies represent an important strategy to deal with this issue. As they have been openly maintained by non-naturalists in the literature, they deserve a whole chapter.

trying to dissolve it, but this is importantly different than being directly engaged with this problem by trying to explain the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties.

In this chapter, I will not equally focus on each direct reply to the problem of supervenience; some are more developed than others, and some appear just more convincing than others. Also, although I will try to cover as much ground as possible to make my case as cogent as possible, my argument is inductive; and as with all inductive arguments, my conclusion is probable, not certain. Also, I should point out that some direct replies to the problem of supervenience introduced in this chapter are my own take on what some non-naturalists would say against the problem of supervenience, basing myself on what they say about the relation between normative and non-normative properties or what they say about similar issues. Finally, the strategy used to show that non-naturalists cannot provide a proper rejection of BRUTE CONNECTION, consisting in going over as many examples as possible, may appear preposterous to some. Nevertheless, I consider this is the best strategy to argue for the conclusion that non-naturalists do not have a proper rejection of BRUTE CONNECTION, while still being fair to them.

The plan of this chapter is the following. I will first consider what a direct reply to the problem of supervenience should look like in order to be satisfactory. I will do so by introducing two criteria that a denial of BRUTE CONNECTION should satisfy to be acceptable. Then, I will argue that none of the available direct replies to the problem of supervenience satisfy both criteria. This supports my conclusion that no direct reply to the problem of supervenience is believable, and, furthermore, that denying BRUTE CONNECTION is not an interesting avenue for non-naturalists to respond to the problem of supervenience.

3.1. What Should a Direct Reply to the Problem of Supervenience Look Like?

A rejection of BRUTE CONNECTION must respect, minimally, the two following criteria:

(i) If a response to the problem of supervenience implies a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities, it should provide an explanation of this connection or justify why an explanation is not required.

(ii) If a response to the problem of supervenience does not imply a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities, it should avoid merely reaffirming in other terms the same necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties stated by SUPERVENIENCE.

Any rejection of Brute Connection that does not respect one of these criteria should be considered inappropriate. To be clear, I consider these criteria as being exclusive. Indeed, I do not see how a reply to the problem of supervenience could fail to respect both criteria: if a response implies a *new* necessary connection, then it cannot simply repeat the same necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties as stated by SUPERVENIENCE. Although, in some cases, it is not perfectly clear whether a response to the problem of supervenience introduces a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities.

What motivates the first criterion is roughly the same methodological considerations that motivate MODEST HUMEAN; and this is why I think this criterion should be appealing to anyone maintaining MODEST HUMEAN. Indeed, if we believe that a brute necessary connection between a normative property and a non-normative property (discontinuous properties according to non-naturalists) counts as a reason to reject non-naturalism, we should also say that, if a response to the problem of supervenience implies a *new brute* necessary connection between other discontinuous entities, this also counts as a reason to reject this response. In other words, if we believe that a brute necessary connection between discontinuous entities is problematic, we should not posit another brute necessary connection between discontinuous entities to explain it. Obviously, if it is possible to explain this new necessary connection between discontinuous

entities, then there will be no worry with this reply. Also, someone could try to justify why it is not possible, for a given case, to explain this new necessary connection between discontinuous entities. Indeed, it might be the case that this new necessary connection between discontinuous entities cannot be explained, but that we have a good justification of why this is so. Hence, if the justification is appropriate, such a line of reply should be deemed acceptable.¹³¹ In this specific case, a reply to the problem of supervenience will satisfy this first criterion.

The second criterion is self-explanatory. Indeed, the idea here is simply that we would have explained nothing if we were just repeating the same necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties posited by SUPERVENIENCE by simply using other terms than the ones used in SUPERVENIENCE. A reply that would merely repeat this same necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties in different terms would fail to provide an *explanation* of the necessary connection between these properties, unless this new way of affirming this necessary connection is, somehow, explanatory. Furthermore, a reply that would merely repeat the same necessary connection posited by SUPERVENIENCE would fail to provide a direct reply to the problem of supervenience, as the point of such a reply is to solve the problem of supervenience by explaining the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties. Repeating the same necessary connection posited by SUPERVENIENCE means that this necessary connection is not explained; if it is not explained, then it is brute; and if it is brute, then this fact counts against non-naturalism.

I will also assume that all the views discussed in this chapter are best understood as trying to explain the necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative. However, at least for some of them, another understanding of what these views are trying to achieve may be

¹³¹ Non-naturalists could say something similar about the brute necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties, but it is important to note that this does not consist in a rejection of BRUTE CONNECTION.

available. Indeed, some views may be best understood as trying to show that there is no real issue with the problem of supervenience rather than directly trying to cope with it. This could be done by claiming that there is, after all, no mystery with a relation of supervenience about the normative. However, it is important to note that maintaining that there is no mystery with the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties is of little help, as I have already argued in the previous chapter that maintaining a *brute* necessary connection between these discontinuous entities counts against a view as such a brute necessary connection is hard to believe. It is hard to believe, and hence mysterious, as we are left wondering what could make it hold and what could explain it.¹³²

In the rest of this chapter, I divide the potential strategies to reject BRUTE CONNECTION into five categories: normative (or ethical), conceptual, essentialist, explanatory metaphysical relation, and, finally, partial constitution relation. I consider that these five categories cover all the general options, although there might be more options than those covered in this chapter. Nevertheless, either these five categories cover all the possibilities, or they cover most possibilities. In both cases, if my argument is convincing, the probability that non-naturalists could reply to the problem of supervenience by denying BRUTE CONNECTION is importantly diminished.¹³³

¹³² I will say more in the conclusion about the possibility of responding to the problem of supervenience by saying that there is nothing mysterious about this problem. All I am showing in this chapter is that all these strategies, insofar as I am right in understanding them as denying BRUTE CONNECTION, are not convincing. This does not mean that these strategies are not compelling if understood in another context, but it does mean – or so I shall argue – that they are not compelling as trying to deny BRUTE CONNECTION.

¹³³ Obviously, if this chapter covers all the possibilities, and if I am right to believe that none of them is working, my case will be stronger than if I missed an interesting option available to non-naturalists.

3.2. Supervenience as a First-order Normative (or Ethical) Truth

According to Matthew Kramer, supervenience is a central property of first-order morality since it is a phenomenon that follows from ethical considerations – or from normative considerations in general (Kramer 2009, chapter 10). As he says, “[...] an appropriate account of the phenomenon [of supervenience] is an ethical account that focuses on the phenomenon’s ethical rationale” (2009, 353). The point of Kramer’s book, *Moral Realism as a Moral Doctrine*, is to argue that moral realism is not a “strange metaphysical theory” (or any kind of metaethical theory), but an “abstract ethical position” (2009, 353). Although it is important to stress that the division between metaethics and first-order ethics is unclear and fuzzy, non-naturalists usually understand their position as being somehow stronger than a pure first-order ethical position, no matter how abstract this first-order ethical position is. And, although there might be first-order moral considerations to maintain (or not to maintain) moral realism, non-naturalists usually want to establish their metaethical position beyond these moral considerations. This is a claim Kramer wants to deny: according to him, moral realism is a full-fledged, and only a, first-order ethical theory. My goal in this section is not to discuss the minute details of Kramer’s ethical explanation of supervenience, but to explain why such an option is not available to non-naturalists. The issue with a normative or an ethical strategy to reply to the problem of supervenience, beyond the fact that it does not satisfy the second criterion, is that it must assume a deflationary understanding of normative facts – something inconsistent with non-naturalists’ core commitments.

For Jonas Olson, there is nothing puzzling with claiming, on the behalf of non-naturalists, that supervenience is explained by ethical truths (2014, 97–98). Indeed, for him, it is easy to understand why non-naturalists would want to explain why it is the case – let us say – that the

normative property of being right necessarily co-varies with the non-normative property of maximizing utility if utilitarianism is the right first-order normative or ethical theory. And, establishing upon which non-normative property a normative property such as being right supervenes is something that can only be done by a first-order ethical truth. However, this line of reply merely restates the relation of supervenience between a normative and a non-normative property, and hence fails to satisfy the second criterion. Indeed, saying that it is an ethical truth that everything that maximizes utility is right merely reaffirms the necessary connection between these two properties posited by the relation of supervenience. Hence, it does not add anything substantial to the metaphysical picture already depicted by this relation.

Furthermore, such a line of reply seems to be possible only if we assume that normative facts are deflationary, something inconsistent with non-naturalism. If normative facts are best understood in a deflationary fashion, then it may be possible to explain normative supervenience by first-order normative truths, as – according to deflationists – normative facts are nothing above or beyond first-order normative truths. However, for non-naturalists, this cannot be the case, as normative facts correspond to the distribution of normative properties (McPherson 2012, 220). Claiming that first-order normative truths can explain the (actual and possible) distribution of normative properties and the variation of normative properties with non-normative properties seems to be misguided (and it would also mean that non-naturalist realism could not be a distinct metaethical view anymore). Indeed, for non-naturalists, first-order normative truths follow from the distribution of normative properties over non-normative properties, not the reverse (McPherson 2012, 220–21). This also supports why it is the case that appealing to ethical truths to explain the necessary connection posited by supervenience fails to satisfy the second criterion: if normative facts cannot be understood in a deflationary fashion (as non-naturalists believe),

then appealing to ethical truths to explain supervenience merely consists in repeating what is already posited by this relation. Hence, saying that supervenience could be explained by normative or ethical considerations is, although interesting, not something possible for non-naturalists.¹³⁴

3.3. Concepts, Conceptual Truths, and Necessary Connection

I understand as conceptual any attempt to reject BRUTE CONNECTION that relies on the notion of “conceptual truths” or “concepts”. One important thing to stress is that I do not believe, for a response to the problem of supervenience to be a representative of this strategy, that it must maintain that SUPERVENIENCE is a conceptual truth. Such a strategy may argue that SUPERVENIENCE itself is a conceptual truth, but it does not have to. Indeed, the second example discussed below, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s conceptual strategy, is an example of a conceptual strategy that does not maintain that SUPERVENIENCE is a conceptual truth; although this strategy heavily relies on the notion of “conceptual truths” and “concepts”. I consider these attempts to reply to the problem of supervenience as unsatisfactory because they fail to satisfy the second criterion.

3.3.1. *Enoch’s Conceptual Strategy*

In the sixth chapter of *Taking Morality Seriously*, Enoch tackles two different versions of the problem of supervenience. The first is usually attributed to Frank Jackson, and it purports to argue that, if normative properties supervene upon non-normative properties, then the former are reducible to the latter. Roughly put, the issue is that each normative property is necessarily co-

¹³⁴ To be clear, my point in this section is fairly modest: I am not claiming that ethical truths cannot explain supervenience, but merely that, it cannot do it *for non-naturalists*.

extensive with a “complex” non-normative property, most likely a disjunctive property that includes all the non-normative properties upon which this normative property supervenes.¹³⁵ If we add the premise that necessarily co-extensive properties are identical (this could be believed for reasons of ontological parsimony¹³⁶), then it seems like – pace non-naturalists’ belief – that normative properties are identical to non-normative properties. Enoch responds to this problem by denying the premise that necessarily co-extensive properties are identical. It is not necessary to develop how Enoch believes that he can deny this premise, since this problem of supervenience is importantly different than the one discussed here.

Enoch also responds to something closer to McPherson’s version of the problem of supervenience. His answer can be understood as a rejection of BRUTE CONNECTION (for reasons I will explain in a moment), although he does not himself put it that way. In a nutshell, Enoch explains the relation of supervenience by appealing to a conceptual truth: “it is conceptually impossible for there to be a normative difference without a natural one” (2011, 148–49). Before explaining further how Enoch’s claim could be understood as a rejection of BRUTE CONNECTION, I need to introduce a distinction he makes between specific and general supervenience.

3.3.1.1. Specific and General Supervenience

Specific supervenience concerns claims such as “the property of being morally wrong supervenes upon the property of failing to maximize utility”. This is a specific supervenience claim as it is about the actual non-normative properties upon which the normative properties

¹³⁵ Whether a disjunctive property can really count as a property is disputed by many, but I prefer to leave this issue aside.

¹³⁶ Campbell Brown maintains this claim by arguing for the general principle that no properties are redundant. Considering that he also argues that, if normative properties supervene upon non-normative properties, then they are redundant as they cannot distinguish between possibilities, he concludes that normative properties are identical to non-normative properties (2011, 210).

supervene (Enoch 2011, 143). These specific claims must of course receive an explanation, and the challenge consists in explaining why it is the case – let us say – that the property of being morally wrong supervenes upon the property of failing to maximize utility. For Enoch, non-naturalists could explain these claims by appealing to the content of the basic (or ultimate) normative norms. Hence, assuming it is a basic normative norm that it is morally wrong to fail to maximize utility, the content of this very norm can explain why it is the case that everything that fails to maximize utility is morally wrong. And, very importantly, this basic normative norm that it is morally wrong to fail to maximize utility will be true only if it is implied by the right first-order normative theory (in this case, a consequentialist view). In other words, whatever is implied by that true first-order normative theory (I am assuming here that there could be only *one* true first-order normative theory) will explain the specific supervenience claims.

General supervenience, unlike specific supervenience, is about the idea that normative properties supervene upon *some* (perhaps unspecified) non-normative (or natural, in Enoch's case) properties. As Enoch says (2011, 142; emphases in the original):

[Y]ou can be committed to [the general supervenience claim] even if you haven't yet settled on a first-order normative theory you're happy with. You may think that you don't yet know what natural property, for instance, *being morally wrong* supervenes on, but that you know that it supervenes on *some* natural property.

For Enoch, because general supervenience is independent of the true first-order normative theory, it cannot be explained by its basic norms. He goes even further in saying that specific and general supervenience are both distinct and logically independent (2011, 143). In the next section, I will mainly focus on general supervenience, as it seems to be the kind of supervenience claim assumed in the problem of supervenience. Indeed, the problem consists in explaining why it is the case that the normative must vary with the non-normative, or why a possible world non-normatively identical to ours should also be normatively identical to ours. Hence, in this

problem, nothing is assumed about specific supervenience claims; although this does not mean that Enoch is right in believing that specific and general supervenience are both distinct and logically independent. Indeed, in section 3.3.1.3, I shall rather argue that a realist and a non-naturalist cannot make the distinction between specific and general supervenience in Enoch's terms.

3.3.1.2. General Supervenience as a (Basic) Conceptual Truth

How is it possible to explain general supervenience? For Enoch, the answer is relatively straightforward: general supervenience is a conceptual truth, as it is *conceptually impossible* for there to be a normative difference without a non-normative or a natural one. Hence, normative properties must vary with non-normative properties, simply because the alternative is conceptually impossible. Enoch supports this point by imagining what would be our responses to a hypothetical speaker who either does not agree with general supervenience or who expresses normative judgments that constantly violate general supervenience. According to Enoch, “we would be inclined to treat [the hypothetical speaker] as using the relevant terms in some non-standard way” (2011, 149). This hypothetical case seems to support the idea that general supervenience is a conceptual truth.

Furthermore, Enoch maintains that the very conceptual truth that is general supervenience cannot be explained. Some conceptual truths could perhaps be explained by other conceptual truths, but Enoch is taking it to be a basic feature of our understanding of normative words and terms that normative properties must vary with non-normative properties (2011, 149). In other words, he is taking general supervenience to be a basic conceptual truth: a truth that cannot be explained further.

One last important thing to note is that, for Enoch, there is nothing metaphysical about general supervenience. While specific supervenience is about metaphysical relations between normative and non-normative properties, general supervenience is *not* about any kind of metaphysical relation between discontinuous entities. In a sense, Enoch's understanding of general supervenience is close to Klagge's ascriptive supervenience, which is about relations between judgments rather than relations between properties. This is also suggested by Enoch's appeal to our responses to a hypothetical speaker who does not respect general supervenience and to his appeal to how we use or understand normative terms. It is in this context that Enoch states that, "[w]hen discussing general supervenience, metaphysics has by and large been left behind" (2011, 149). Before explaining why I consider that Enoch's conceptual strategy is not acceptable, it is necessary to state explicitly how such a strategy could be understood as a denial of BRUTE CONNECTION. By the same token, it is also necessary to cast doubts on Enoch's comments about the relation between general supervenience and metaphysics, and this idea that general supervenience has nothing to do with metaphysics.

3.3.1.3. Assessment of Enoch's Response

The best way to understand Enoch's response to the problem of supervenience is to put it in terms of what is *definitional* of the normative and how that explains supervenience.¹³⁷ BRUTE CONNECTION would then be denied by stating what it is for something to be a normative property: for something to be a normative property, it must vary with non-normative properties in such a way that two things non-normatively identical must also be normatively identical. I

¹³⁷ As McPherson puts it when he discusses strategies that explain supervenience as an analytic truth: "On this account, it is perhaps because it is *definitional* of 'ethical' that nothing could count as an ethical property unless it covaried in this way. This strategy claims to meet the bruteness challenge: the necessary connection is explained by the way a property would have to be, in order to be what we talk about when we talk about ethical properties" (2015, section 4.4).

consider this consistent with Enoch's point that general supervenience is a basic feature of how we use normative terms. Importantly, such claims purport to explain why it is the case that there is a necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties – this necessary connection being derived from what it means for something to be a normative property –, and then purport to consider this connection as not being brute anymore. The issue with this strategy is that it *fails* to explain why it is the case that the normative supervenes upon the non-normative.

More specifically, Enoch's conceptual strategy does not satisfy the second criterion introduced above: his explanation of general supervenience merely reaffirms in other terms the same necessary connection between discontinuous entities. Indeed, it reaffirms the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties by claiming that, normative properties being what they are, they are necessarily connected with non-normative properties. This is equivalent to saying that, because it is a basic feature of our use of normative words that normative properties must vary with non-normative properties, then normative properties must vary with non-normative properties. Putting it in terms of our use of normative words is merely something that reaffirms the necessary connection posited by SUPERVENIENCE rather than explaining it. To use an example from Jamie Dreier in "Explaining the Quasi-Real" (2015, 281), Enoch's response to the problem of supervenience is similar to someone responding "because it is a normative property and hence it is conceptually necessary that some non-normative property necessitates it" to the question "How does the property underlying the very-goodness of St. Francis necessitate his very-goodness?" It is a bad answer to the question because it merely reaffirms the question in different terms, and hence it *fails* to provide what is called for in an

explanation. In other words, it is a bad answer because the explanans is just the explanandum stated differently: the answer to the question is just the question stated differently.¹³⁸

Another thing we could infer from this is that, in opposition to what Enoch believes, specific and general supervenience claims do not seem to be fully distinct nor logically independent. Enoch, being a realist, cannot say that the fact that normative properties are determined by non-normative properties depends on our normative concepts or on our use of normative terms (an antirealist might very well say that). Rather, he needs to maintain something more robust, something that states that the necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative properties does not merely depend on our use of the normative terms. Hence, it looks like Enoch's explanation of general supervenience is incomplete. In order to complete it, he should appeal to more robust metaphysical relations between normative and non-normative properties; something he considers necessary only to explain specific supervenience claims (Enoch 2011, 147).¹³⁹

In other words, my point is that if normative properties are as they are understood by non-naturalists, then an explanation of general supervenience should refer to something in the metaphysics of normative properties or of their relations with non-normative properties.¹⁴⁰ Hence, an explanation of general supervenience cannot merely rely on our use of normative terms, and, most likely, general supervenience cannot itself be understood as a pure conceptual truth by non-naturalists. Hence, it is far from being obvious that – in opposition to what Enoch believes (2011, 149) – metaphysics has been left behind when we discuss general supervenience.

¹³⁸ Wielenberg also makes a similar point regarding Enoch's response to the problem of supervenience (2014, 22).

¹³⁹ As we will see in section 3.6.2, and as Enoch himself notes (2011, 144, n. 29), Scanlon introduces an explanation of supervenience that shares some similarities with Enoch's explanation. However, while general supervenience is understood as a conceptual claim by Enoch, it is not clear that Scanlon agrees. Indeed, for Scanlon, general supervenience is explained by pure normative claims and facts, not by how we use normative terms and concepts.

¹⁴⁰ McPherson also makes a similar point (2012, 222).

However, it is still possible to use conceptual truths to deny BRUTE CONNECTION in a more robust fashion; this is exactly what Cuneo and Shafer-Landau do in their paper entitled “The Moral Fixed Points: New Directions for Moral Nonnaturalists”. In the next section, I will introduce Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s view, and explain why I consider that even this more robust appeal to conceptual truths does not work.

3.3.2. *Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s Conceptual Strategy*

According to Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, it is possible to reply to the problem of supervenience by referring to some substantive moral propositions that are also conceptual truths; what they call the “moral fixed points”.

3.3.2.1. The Moral Fixed Points

Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s main goal is to introduce a new form of moral non-naturalism. According to it, there are some claims that any system must include in order to be worth calling a moral system, claims that they call the “moral fixed points”. Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s idea is that, if a system x does not include these claims, then x is not a moral system – although it could still be a *normative* system. More specifically, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau introduce the notion of a *minimally eccentric moral system*, which they understand as being “a reasonably comprehensive and consistent body of moral propositions that apply to beings like us in a world such as ours” (2014, 404). By beings like us, they refer to beings that are mortal, have a body, have a memory, are capable of feeling pleasures and pains, able to operate at least minimal reasoning, etc. And by a world such as ours, they refer to a world that “is regulated by laws of nature and regulated by broad empirical statistical generalizations close to the ones that obtain here on earth” (2014, 404).

For Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, any minimally eccentric moral system should include the moral fixed points. Here are a few examples of what they have in mind (these do not represent the whole content of the moral fixed points) (2014, 405):¹⁴¹

- (i) It is *pro tanto* wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person.
- (ii) It is *pro tanto* wrong to humiliate others simply for pleasure.
- (iii) If acting justly is costless, then, *ceteris paribus*, one should act justly.
- (iv) It is *pro tanto* wrong to satisfy a mild desire if this requires killing many innocent people.

All these propositions, as I said, must be part of any system that is worth calling a “moral system”.¹⁴² Furthermore, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau believe that these moral fixed points are *conceptual* truths (2014, 407–8). They identify at least four reasons (not necessarily conclusive) to believe that these truths are conceptual truths. First, moral fixed points, if true, are *necessarily* true. Second, moral fixed points enjoy framework status: any system that does not accept the moral fixed points does not count as a moral system. Third, denials of the moral fixed points “tend to evoke bewilderment among those competent with its constituent concepts” (2014, 408). Finally, moral fixed points are knowable *a priori*. They believe that claims such as “that it is wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person” illustrate all these features: if it is true that it is wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person, then it is so necessarily; a system that does not accept this claim should not count as a moral system; someone denying this claim is very likely conceptually confused; and we could, by analysis of

¹⁴¹ Because Cuneo and Shafer-Landau believe that these claims are true for beings like us in worlds such as ours, each claim should be understood as being true only for beings like us in worlds such as ours. From now on, I will also omit mentioning the “*pro tanto*” qualifier.

¹⁴² Although, it is important to note that, even if we might be quite confident that all these claims are true, we might be mistaken about the specific content of the moral fixed points. The fact that we could be mistaken about whether a specific claim is a member of the moral fixed points should not be understood as a denial of the existence of such things as the moral fixed points. I merely assume here that Cuneo and Shafer-Landau are right about the content of the moral fixed points.

the content of the concepts of such a claim, know *a priori* that it is wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person.

Another important point to underline is that, for Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, conceptual truths do not have to be obvious, formal, nor vacuous truths. As an example, the proposition “that justified true belief is insufficient for knowledge” is, for Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, a conceptual truth, even if it is a substantive truth that we could only get to know by doing heavy epistemology (2014, 408).

To really understand how moral fixed points could be conceptual truths, it is necessary to say more about how Cuneo and Shafer-Landau understand concepts. The view of concepts that they maintain, which they call the “traditional view”, implies that concepts have three distinct features. First, concepts are abstract metaphysical entities; they are neither mental nor linguistic entities. Second, concepts are the constitutive components of propositions. To use Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s expression, “concepts are the building blocks or sub-components of propositions” (2014, 409). Third, concepts are “*referential devices or ways of getting things in mind* that enable thinkers to refer to things such as objects and properties” (2014, 410; emphases in the original).

Cuneo and Shafer-Landau understand this last point as meaning that concepts determine necessarily the entities to which they refer, that is to say that concepts have essences. For instance, because concepts have essences, the concept “being wrong” does determine necessarily the entities to which it refers and the entities to which it can be correctly applied. As they say: “The concept ‘being wrong,’ for example, could not be the concept it is if it were not about wrongness; it belongs to the essence of the concept that it applies to exactly those things that are wrong” (2014, 410). This is also an important difference between words and concepts. The word

“wrong” could be the word it actually is without being about wrongness, but this is not true of the concept “being wrong”. Because concepts have essences, if the proposition “that x is F ” is a conceptual truth, then it belongs to the essence of F that, necessarily, anything that satisfies x also satisfies F . Or, if the proposition “that it is wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person” is a conceptual truth, then it is necessary that anything that satisfies “recreational slaughter” also satisfies “being wrong”. It is necessarily so because conceptual truths are necessarily true; this is, I recall, an essential feature of conceptual truths according to Cuneo and Shafer-Landau. Then, they maintain the following claim (2014, 411–12):

The Embellished Core Claim: There are non-natural moral truths, these truths include the moral fixed points, which are a species of conceptual truth, as they are propositions that are true in virtue of the essences of their constituent concepts.

From this, it is possible, according to Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, to respond to the problem of supervenience by denying BRUTE CONNECTION. Hence, they believe that they can explain the necessary connection between moral and non-moral properties.

3.3.2.2. Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s Rejection of BRUTE CONNECTION

Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s take¹⁴³ on the problem of supervenience consists in, as I said previously, rejecting BRUTE CONNECTION; although they say that they are also “deeply suspicious” of MODEST HUMEAN’s truth (2014, 429).¹⁴⁴ Cuneo and Shafer-Landau argue that

¹⁴³ Cuneo and Shafer-Landau in fact offer two ways of responding to the problem of supervenience. One of them is what I will discuss in the core of this section, and it requires assuming that robust non-naturalism is true. The other requires assuming that minimal non-naturalism is true. If minimal non-naturalism is true, then there are no non-natural moral properties. And if there are no non-natural moral properties, then the problem of supervenience does not arise since there must be non-natural moral properties for there to be a necessary connection between discontinuous entities. This way of replying to the problem of supervenience is a fair one, *if* minimal non-naturalism is true. However, I believe that minimal non-naturalism does not represent what non-naturalists usually seek to maintain. See chapter 1 for more details on this point.

¹⁴⁴ Cuneo and Shafer-Landau do not provide that much to support why they are suspicious of MODEST HUMEAN, but they refer to Wielenberg’s discussion of it (2014, 32–36). However, as I argued in section 2.3.4, I think Wielenberg’s attempt to deny MODEST HUMEAN is unsuccessful.

they can reject BRUTE CONNECTION, as the moral fixed points can provide an explanation of the necessary connection that hold between moral and non-moral properties. As I explained in the previous section, the main element of their view that explains these necessary connection is that concepts have essences. Hence, it is going to be the essence of moral concepts that will explain why it is the case that there is a necessary connection between moral and non-moral properties. As Cuneo and Shafer-Landau state (2014, 430):

The moral fixed points offer a model of how to think about such connections, as it might belong to the concept “being wrong” that, given a certain range of natural properties, these properties must have the higher-order moral property being wrong.

Assuming that the proposition “that it is wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person” is a conceptual truth, it is because of the *essence* of the concept “being wrong” that it is going to be the case that everything that is being recreational slaughter will also be necessarily wrong. In other words, it belongs to the essence of the concept “being wrong” that the properties that satisfy the concept “recreational slaughter” must have the higher-order moral property being wrong.

Hence, for Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, the necessary connection between the discontinuous properties being wrong and recreational slaughter holds of conceptual necessity, because the essence of the concept “being wrong” implies that everything that is recreational slaughter is also wrong. This is so mainly because the proposition “that it is wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person” is one of the moral fixed points, and hence a conceptual truth.

This represents a very straightforward reply to the problem of supervenience. Indeed, if Cuneo and Shafer-Landau are right, then there is no such thing as a brute necessary connection between moral and non-moral properties: this connection is *explained*, and hence not *brute*, by the essence of moral concepts. And, because BRUTE CONNECTION would then be denied, non-

naturalists who believe in the moral fixed points will have answered the problem of supervenience.

One thing that is important to stress, before moving to the reasons why Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's reply to the problem of supervenience is problematic, is that they probably do not need to maintain that every instance of supervenience between moral and non-moral properties is *directly* explained by one of the moral fixed points. Indeed, arguing that every instance of moral supervenience is directly explained by a moral fixed point, or by a moral conceptual truth, would most likely unnecessarily amplify the content of the moral fixed points. And, just as the reason why John's humiliation of Susan simply for pleasure is wrong is explained, not by the conceptual truth "that it is wrong for John to humiliate Susan simply for pleasure" (to be clear, this is not a conceptual truth), but by the conceptual truth "that it is wrong to humiliate others simply for pleasure", then we can say that many – if not most – cases of moral supervenience are explained in the same indirect fashion by a moral fixed point.¹⁴⁵

3.3.2.3. Assessment of Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's View

It might be fair to say that, at first sight, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's reply to the problem of supervenience introduces a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities, namely between moral and non-moral concepts. Indeed, their answer seems to imply that everything that satisfies the concept "recreational slaughter" also, necessarily, satisfies the concept "being wrong". They justify this claim by saying that it belongs to the essence of the concept "being wrong" that everything that satisfies the concept "recreational slaughter" also, and necessarily,

¹⁴⁵ I also assume that it is possible to generalize to normative supervenience what Cuneo and Shafer-Landau say about moral supervenience, although this point is contentious as it is not clear that there are *normative* fixed points beyond the *moral* fixed points, and as it seems unlikely that all normative supervenience could be explained by the moral fixed points.

satisfies the concept “being wrong”, insofar as “that it is wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person” is a conceptual truth. This is a necessary connection between discontinuous entities because Cuneo and Shafer-Landau believe, as all non-naturalists do, that moral concepts are neither identical nor reducible to non-moral concepts, and that they cannot be analyzed by non-moral concepts or in non-moral terms. I take this to mean that they maintain that moral concepts are discontinuous with non-moral concepts. Hence, their reply to the problem of supervenience seems to posit a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities, and then the same reason to be suspicious towards the necessary connection between moral and non-moral properties should also be applied to the necessary connection between moral and non-moral concepts. If this is so, then Cuneo and Shafer-Landau should either explain this new necessary connection or justify why it is not possible to provide an explanation of this connection to satisfy the first criterion.¹⁴⁶

However, even if their view seems to introduce a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities, I think this is misleading. Indeed, even if it *seems like* Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s appeal to the essence of moral concepts is introducing a new and distinct necessary connection between discontinuous entities, I think it is best to conclude that they are only restating the same necessary connection between moral and non-moral properties posited by SUPERVENIENCE. If this is right, then their response would fail to satisfy the second criterion, not the first criterion. By the same token, it would fail to provide a response to the problem of supervenience.

¹⁴⁶ As a matter of fact, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau do provide a justification of why they would not have to explain this new necessary connection. Their justification is summarized by the following quote: “We ought not extend the MODEST HUMEAN claim in such a way that it is also a thesis about discontinuous concepts” (2014, 431). To justify this, they introduce examples of conceptual truths, other than the moral fixed points, that hold between non-natural and natural concepts.

The reason why Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's view fails to satisfy the second criterion is that "satisfying a concept" and "having a property" are best understood as being identical things for (robust) non-naturalists. This point is important because Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's response to the problem of supervenience relies on the fact that, considering the essence of a given moral concept, everything that satisfies a specific non-moral concept must also satisfy the moral concept. However, if "satisfying a concept" and "having a property" end up being identical things, as I think they are for non-naturalists, then Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's point is merely an affirmation of the necessary connection between moral and non-moral properties they are supposed to explain. Let me explain this point further.

For robust non-naturalists, only a moral property can satisfy a moral concept: only a moral property such as the property of being wrong can satisfy the concept "being wrong". Otherwise, their commitment to non-naturalism would be completely unnecessary. Indeed, if we were to believe that moral properties exist (that is to say, if we were to believe in robust non-naturalism and not merely in minimal non-naturalism), it seems odd not to attribute to them the role of satisfying moral concepts. In other words, what would be the reason to believe that moral properties exist if they are not even necessary to satisfy moral concepts? If non-naturalists such as Cuneo and Shafer-Landau want to take non-naturalism seriously, I consider they need to say that an action x can satisfy the concept "being wrong" only if x bears the property of being wrong.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ In comparison, an expressivist like Allan Gibbard maintains that moral or normative concepts, even if irreducible to non-moral or non-normative concepts, are satisfied by natural properties (Gibbard 2012). But Gibbard can maintain this because he is not committed to the existence of moral or normative properties, as he is not maintaining a realist position about morality and normativity. This is, I believe, something *robust* non-naturalists cannot maintain.

Another reason to believe that only a moral property can satisfy a moral concept is that non-naturalists want to keep moral concepts – not just moral properties – irreducible to natural and non-moral concepts. Saying that only moral properties can satisfy moral concepts, and that moral properties are distinct from non-moral properties, would provide an interesting explanation of why moral concepts are irreducible to non-moral concepts. Obviously, this does not mean that natural properties could not also indirectly satisfy moral concepts, but they will do so only by making it the case that something has a moral property (i.e. they cannot directly satisfy a moral concept).

Furthermore, I think non-naturalists will agree that only a natural property can satisfy a natural concept (or: only a non-moral property can satisfy a non-moral concept). In other words, only a natural property such as the property of being a recreational slaughter of a fellow person can satisfy the natural concept “being a recreational slaughter of a fellow person” (this does not mean that only *that* property can satisfy the natural concept, but that only a natural property could do it). Saying otherwise, and more specifically saying that a moral property could satisfy a natural concept (keeping in mind that moral and natural concepts are assumed to be discontinuous here), seems to be something close to a category mistake.

If all this is true, then it is fair to say that the necessary connection between – for instance – the property being wrong and the property recreational slaughter is just reaffirmed in other terms by Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s response to the problem of supervenience, namely in the terms of “satisfying the concept being wrong” and “satisfying the concept recreational slaughter”. Indeed, if the only way something can satisfy a moral concept is by having a moral property, and if the only way something can satisfy a natural concept is by having a natural property, then saying that the necessary connection between moral and natural properties is explained by a necessary

connection between moral and natural concepts seems to be nothing else than an affirmation, but in other terms, of the explanandum.¹⁴⁸ And this is the reason why Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's response to the problem of supervenience fails to be satisfactory: it merely reaffirms what it is supposed to explain. In other words, it fails to satisfy the second criterion.

3.4. Essences and Necessary Connection

In this section, I will discuss only one example of the essentialist strategy to reject BRUTE CONNECTION, Stephanie Leary's view.¹⁴⁹ This category of strategy (usually) focuses on the essences of normative properties to explain the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties. I propose to focus on only one example of this strategy for the main reason that Leary's view appears to me the most convincing and complete example of the essentialist strategy. The reason why I consider that Leary's response to the problem of supervenience should, ultimately, be rejected, is that it fails to satisfy the first criterion. Indeed, Leary's view introduces a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities without explaining it or providing a proper justification of it.

¹⁴⁸ A potential reply from Cuneo and Shafer-Landau could be that there must be moral fixed points, as there must be boundaries or limits to what can be included in a moral system (insofar as we refuse to maintain radical relativism). Hence, because moral fixed points are conceptual truths, it has to be the case that the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties is explained by a necessary connection between normative and non-normative concepts. However, such a reply seems to overestimate the very idea of moral fixed points, as it is far from being obvious that they are conceptual truths, and it is even less obvious that conceptual truths must be understood as Cuneo and Shafer-Landau understand them.

¹⁴⁹ For another example of this kind of strategy, see Corradini (forthcoming). Ralph Wedgwood also appeals to the essence of normative properties to respond to issues related with supervenience in the ninth chapter of *The Nature of Normativity* (2007). However, I have decided not to discuss Wedgwood's view in this section, mainly for two reasons. First, Wedgwood seems more interested in issues regarding reduction. Second, Wedgwood's view has been already discussed in detail by others. For more, see McPherson (2009) and Schmitt and Schroeder (2011).

3.4.1. Leary's Essentially Grounded Non-naturalism

In a nutshell, Stephanie Leary's view is that non-naturalists may reject BRUTE CONNECTION by arguing that the essences of some normative properties (which she calls *hybrid* normative properties) explain why normative properties necessarily vary with non-normative properties (Leary 2017, 77). To further explain Leary's view, the first thing to unwrap is the view of essence that she is taking on board, namely Fine's view (1994a, 1994b).

According to Fine, the essential truths of an object or a property are the propositions that are *directly definitive* of that object or property. These propositions that are directly definitive of an object or property will state the *nature* of that object or property. Or, as Leary puts it (2017, 94): "We may thus say that the essence of F *involves* G just in case G is a constituent of some proposition that is directly definitive of F". Leary also follows Fine in believing that essences can explain grounding facts, such as "the existence of Socrates grounds that the singleton {Socrates} exists". As explained previously in this chapter, grounding relations are usually understood as explanatory, but non-causal, relations of the kind "x obtains because of y" or "x obtains in virtue of y".¹⁵⁰

To maintain how essential facts can explain grounding facts, Leary introduces the following example (2017, 94–95): the fact that *e* is a rock show is grounded in the fact that *e* consists of people acting in a certain way W. What would explain this grounding fact, according to essentialists about grounding, is that it is *essential* to being a rock show that people are acting in a way W during that event. Because acting in a way W is essential to being a rock show, if people are not acting in a way W, but in a way W*, then the event simply cannot be a rock show (it might be a jazz show). Hence, the reason why *e* is a rock show is because one or more

¹⁵⁰ However, I will explain in section 3.5.2., Wielenberg maintains that a grounding relation can be causal.

essential facts about the thing “rock show” can be rightly attributed to *e*, these facts being propositions that are directly definitive of what is a rock show (whatever are these specific facts should not matter in the actual context). Leary also understands essences as being “autonomous”, that is to say that essences are neither grounded nor fundamental. That means that facts about essences cannot be explained (Leary 2017, 95).

Leary then defines what she calls “essentialist non-naturalism” as being the view according to which “the essences of some normative properties (i) cannot be specified entirely in non-normative terms, and (ii) do not specify any non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation” (2017, 96). Therefore, according to her, essentialism non-naturalism is a thoroughly non-naturalist view about normativity, as the nature of the properties that cannot be defined entirely in non-normative terms and that do not involve sufficient conditions for their instantiation involves something that is irreducibly normative. This would be the reason why at least some normative properties are of their own kind; and this is what Leary identifies as the *sui generis* normative properties.

However, not all normative properties are like that, as the nature of some normative properties specify non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation. This is what Leary identifies as the *hybrid* normative properties. Another feature of these properties is that, beyond that fact that their nature specifies non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation, their nature also specifies sufficient conditions for the instantiation of the *sui generis* normative properties (2017, 98). Leary introduces the following example to make this point clear: it is part of the essence of being in pain (understood here as a hybrid normative property) that (a) if one’s C-fibers are firing, then one is in pain, and (b) that if *x* is a painful experience, then *x* is bad (understood as a *sui generis* normative property). Hence, it is the essence of hybrid normative

properties that seem to do all the “metaphysical work”: they explain how everything that is normative necessarily varies with the non-normative. Indeed, these hybrid properties *both* specify sufficient non-normative conditions for their own instantiation, and they specify sufficient conditions for the instantiation of the *sui generis* normative properties. Take these hybrid normative properties out of the picture, and you have no relation between the non-normative and the *sui generis* normative.

Leary’s view, if right, is a promising response to the problem of supervenience as, considering that the essences of hybrid properties both specify sufficient non-normative conditions for their instantiation and sufficient conditions for the instantiation of the *sui generis* normative properties, it is necessarily the case that the normative varies with the non-normative.

3.4.1.1. Assessment of Leary’s View

I consider that Leary’s reply to the problem of supervenience satisfies the second criterion introduced above, as it does not merely restate the same necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative posited by the relation of supervenience and does introduce a new necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative. More specifically, this new necessary connection is holding between the hybrid normative and the non-normative; a necessary connection not implied by the supervenience relation. As a matter of fact, what Leary is doing consists in introducing a new category to the normative domain: the hybrid normative. Unlike the *sui generis* normative properties, the hybrid normative properties specify sufficient non-normative conditions for their instantiation, and are hence necessarily connected with the non-normative.

To explain how this adds a new category to the normative domain, and, more importantly, how it introduces a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities, let me use an analogy with the thin and the thick in normativity. Thin normative entities are properties such as being morally good or being morally bad. It is generally agreed that these entities do not have to be understood in terms of the non-normative as well as the normative. Thick normative entities are properties such as being courageous or being lewd. It is generally agreed that these entities must be understood in terms of the normative *and* of the non-normative. Although how this must be done is debatable, it is generally agreed that to understand a thick normative entity, we must also refer to some non-normative entities or terms.

Hence, we could say that the normative is divided into two categories: the thin and the thick.¹⁵¹ We could also say that neither is reducible to the other, and that neither of them specifies sufficient non-normative conditions for its instantiation. We could also believe that the thick should be understood in terms of the thin and the non-normative, so that the lewd (a thick normative notion) can only be understood in terms of some thin normative and non-normative notions. More specifically, following Toppinen (forthcoming, 5), we could say that, if something is lewd, then it “involves” overt display of sexuality (a non-normative property), and this is part of the essence of the lewd. However, this does not necessarily mean that the essence of the lewd specifies non-normative *sufficient* conditions for its instantiation, as saying that, if something is lewd, then it involves overt display of sexuality is consistent with something involving overt display of sexuality without being lewd. In this case, there would be no new necessary connection between the thick and the non-normative.

¹⁵¹ Granted, such division between the thin and the thick is usually reserved for *concepts*, not for entities.

It is precisely in stating that the essences of hybrid properties specify non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation that Leary is introducing a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities: the hybrid is discontinuous from the non-normative (as the hybrid normative's nature cannot be understood in terms of the non-normative's nature), but it also states non-normative sufficient conditions for its instantiation (this being an essential fact about it).¹⁵² In comparison, all the supervenience relation is stating is that two worlds non-normatively identical must also be normatively identical. However, this is too weak to imply that the normative (either the hybrid normative or the *sui generis* normative) specifies non-normative sufficient conditions for its instantiation. Leary's view about hybrid normative properties and essential facts states a more fine-grained metaphysical relation, namely that the hybrid normative properties necessarily state non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation. Hence, Leary's view introduces a new necessary connection between distinct entities.

To satisfy the first criterion, it is then necessary to either explain this new necessary connection between discontinuous entities, or to justify why no explanation is required. Leary's way to satisfy this criterion is best understood as being an attempt to justify why no explanation is required. Indeed, Leary explains how the normative properties necessarily vary with the non-normative properties by appealing to the essences of the hybrid normative properties: their essences specify non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation, and sufficient conditions for the instantiation of the *sui generis* normative properties. However, she maintains that essential facts themselves *cannot* be explained, as essential facts are simply not the kind of things that can be explained. Hence, essential facts are brute, as there are no meaningful

¹⁵² Importantly, Leary is not stating that the hybrid normative can be understood in non-normative terms, but merely that the hybrid normative states sufficient non-normative conditions for its instantiation. Hence, her view of the hybrid normative is consistent with the definition of metaphysical discontinuity provided in the first chapter.

questions about these facts of the kind “what does explain an essential fact about x ” or “what does ground an essential fact about y ”.

However, considering that essential facts are something we discover, not something that we could simply posit or assume, it is legitimate to ask for an explanation of why some facts are essential facts. This is an explanation that Leary believes she does not have to provide, as she believes that essential facts cannot be explained. Still, considering the important metaphysical role she attributes to essential facts, her justification according to which essential facts about hybrid normative properties cannot be further explained seems to be too quick and highly unsatisfactory. For instance, there is a significant difference between maintaining that the essence of being a bachelor involves being unmarried, an adult, and a male (and cannot be explained further) and maintaining that the essence of a hybrid normative property specifies *all* the non-normative sufficient conditions for its instantiation (and cannot be explained further).¹⁵³

To make this last point clear, as Leary suggests, it could be an essential fact about the hybrid normative property of making a promise that if certain non-normative conditions C obtain, then A promised B to do x (2017, 99). However, the property of making a promise is not like the property of being a bachelor, and the relation between the former and the non-normative conditions C and the relation between the latter and being unmarried, an adult, and a male is far from being perfectly analogous. The first point of departure is that it is very unlikely that we could pinpoint one simple non-normative condition C such that, when it obtains, the property of

¹⁵³ The essence of a hybrid normative properties must specify *all* these non-normative sufficient conditions, otherwise Leary’s view will fail to explain how it is necessarily the case that the *sui generis* normative properties supervene upon the non-normative properties.

being a promise also obtains.¹⁵⁴ We could do that for the property of being a bachelor, as it is very likely that being unmarried, an adult, and a male is the only condition that could obtain that could make it the case that the property of being a bachelor also obtains, this being explained by the identity of these properties. However, it is quite dubious that the non-normative sufficient conditions of instantiation of the property of being a promise could be understood in the terms of one *unified* non-normative sufficient condition, as there are potentially quite disparate ways for something to instantiate the property of being a promise.¹⁵⁵

The second point of departure is that the “metaphysical gap” or the intimacy of the metaphysical relations involved in each case is quite different: while the properties of being a bachelor and being unmarried, an adult, and a male seem to be in an “intimate metaphysical relation”, as Toppinen suggests in discussing Leary’s view (forthcoming, 8), the metaphysical relation between the property of making a promise and the non-normative conditions C does not seem as intimate. For instance, it cannot be explained in terms of identity, nor in terms of conceptual analysis, nor in terms of a species-genus relation, nor in terms of determinable and determinate, etc., as having the hybrid normative property of making a promise is something “over and above” the non-normative conditions C. This is so because hybrid normative properties are, at least most likely, irreducible to non-normative properties or conditions. In contrast, having the properties of being unmarried, an adult, and a male is not something over and above the property of being a bachelor, as the property of being a bachelor is, at least most likely, reducible to the conjunction of the properties being unmarried, an adult, and a male.

¹⁵⁴ This would be so even if the non-normative condition C is a disjunction, as it seems unlikely that the different elements of this disjunction would be organized under one general principle. Hence, claiming that C is a disjunction seems only pushing the issue one step further.

¹⁵⁵ I consider what I am maintaining here as being similar to the idea introduced by McDowell that the evaluative is shapeless with respect to the non-evaluative (1981).

Considering all this, it seems difficult to provide a proper justification of why essential facts about hybrid normative properties do not have to be explained. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that Leary's response to the problem of supervenience does not satisfy the first criterion. To make it clear, the reason is that Leary's justification for not providing an explanation of the necessary connection between the hybrid normative properties and non-normative properties posited by the essential facts about hybrid properties is far from being convincing. Her justification, I recall, is that essential facts cannot be explained; they are brute facts. Nevertheless, it seems dubious that essential facts about hybrid normative properties could specify *all* the non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation, something she says she does not have to explain as essential facts cannot be explained. Hence, without further development, I think Leary's view should be rejected.

3.5. Explanatory Metaphysical Relations

In this section, I will assess two examples of a strategy to deny BRUTE CONNECTION that relies on a metaphysical relation that is similar to the relation of supervenience, except for the difference that this relation would be explanatory. Indeed, the core of such a strategy is to introduce a metaphysical relation, stronger than the supervenience relation, that is also considered explanatory (I recall that the supervenience relation is usually not considered as being explanatory). Hence, the point of the strategy discussed in this section is to deny BRUTE CONNECTION by providing a metaphysical relation similar to the relation of supervenience but that would have the advantage of explaining why or how it is the case that the normative necessarily varies with the non-normative.

I will discuss two examples of this strategy: the first example comes from Shafer-Landau, and it relies on a realization relation; the second comes from Wielenberg, and it relies on a making relation that is understood by Wielenberg as being causal. The core problem with this strategy, in a nutshell, is that it does not satisfy the second criterion, as it only restates, but in different terms, the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties posited by SUPERVENIENCE. However, there is also another issue with this kind of strategy: as we will see in a moment, appealing to an explanatory metaphysical relation appears to be inconsistent with non-naturalists' commitment to normative properties as *sui generis*. Indeed, an explanatory metaphysical relation seems to be something that, for instance, naturalist realists could maintain, but not non-naturalist realists, as it seems to presuppose that normative properties are metaphysically continuous with non-normative (or natural) properties. This issue will hold even if an explanatory metaphysical relation would satisfy the two criteria (which I think is not the case, anyway).

3.5.1. Shafer-Landau's Realization Relation

In *Moral Realism* (2003), Russ Shafer-Landau introduces an original metaphysical understanding of non-naturalism that might be promising regarding the problem of supervenience. In a nutshell, Shafer-Landau's response to this problem is that normative facts are realized by non-normative facts, explaining by the same token why there is a metaphysically necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties. Before assessing this response to the problem of supervenience, I shall introduce in further detail Shafer-Landau's view of the metaphysics of normative facts and properties.

3.5.1.1. Exhaustive Constitution and Realization

Shafer-Landau is trying to maintain a metaphysics of non-natural normative properties similar to the metaphysics of mental properties maintained by non-reductionists in philosophy of mind. According to these non-reductionists, mental properties are not identical to physical properties, although every instantiation of a mental property is *realized* by an instantiation of some physical properties. Hence, the important contribution of non-reductionists in philosophy of mind would be to argue that, while mental properties are exhaustively constituted by physical properties, they are not at all identical or reducible to them (the reasons why non-reductionists in philosophy of mind believe so are not relevant for now).

So, following non-reductionists in philosophy of mind, Shafer-Landau proposes that non-naturalists in metaethics should also say that normative properties are exhaustively constituted by natural properties. The only other option would be to maintain that normative properties are also partly constituted by supernatural facts, as denying that normative properties are exhaustively constituted by natural properties amounts to saying that two naturalistically identical worlds could be normatively different.¹⁵⁶ This last claim could be explained by a divine command theory, as – most likely – “divine attitudes” could be different in naturalistically identical worlds. This would explain why these worlds are normatively different even if they are naturalistically or non-normatively identical. However, if we believe that such a divine command theory is somehow not correct, then the only other option seems to maintain that normative facts are

¹⁵⁶ Shafer-Landau’s approach is slightly reductive here, considering (as we will discuss in section 3.6) that there are options that deny that normative facts are exhaustively constituted by non-normative facts without appealing to supernatural facts.

exhaustively constituted by natural facts.¹⁵⁷ That means that nothing else than natural facts can confer to something the normative status it has.

As Shafer-Landau states (2003, 75): “There is nothing to a case of generosity, or viciousness, or dutiful action, other than the natural features that constitute such properties. Something exemplifies a moral property entirely in virtue of its possessing certain natural features”. This does not mean that normative properties are reducible to non-normative or natural features, as – according to Shafer-Landau – reductionists cannot explain how a normative property could be exemplified by a natural property “other than the one whose instantiation, at a time, has in fact subserved it” (2003, 75). Indeed, Shafer-Landau seems to believe that, for reductionists, only one natural property could exemplify a normative property, something inconsistent with our strong intuition that there are many ways something could be wrong. In other words, for Shafer-Landau, while reductionists are committed to a one-to-one relation between normative and non-normative properties, non-naturalists are “pluralists” as they believe that the same normative property could be instantiated by different non-normative properties (hence denying a one-to-one relation) (Shafer-Landau 2003, 92). This conclusion follows only from a very narrow understanding of normative reductionism, but Shafer-Landau is nevertheless not totally wrong to believe that the multiple realization feature of normative (or mental) properties is often seen as a reason to deny reductionism (however, it would be too quick to conclude, from this point alone, that normative properties are discontinuous with non-normative properties).

¹⁵⁷ Or by the non-normative facts, minus the supernatural facts (assuming these facts are not themselves normative).

More specifically, Shafer-Landau believes that natural properties exhaustively constitute normative properties because the former realize the latter. This would also explain why the normative supervenes upon the natural, as the normative is *fixed* by the natural. As Shafer-Landau clearly explains (2003, 77):

According to the sort of ethical non-naturalism that I favour, a moral fact supervenes on a particular concatenation of descriptive facts just because these facts realize the moral property in question. Moral facts necessarily covary with descriptive ones because moral properties are always realized exclusively by descriptive ones. Just as facts about a pencil's qualities are fixed by facts about its material constitution, or facts about subjective feelings by neurophysiological (and perhaps intentional) ones, moral facts are fixed and constituted by their descriptive constituents.

Hence, Shafer-Landau appeals to a metaphysical relation between normative and non-normative or natural properties to explain why it is the case that there is a metaphysically necessary connection between these two categories of properties and facts. This specific metaphysical relation is, first, an exhaustive constitution relation going from the non-normative to the normative (in the sense that nothing else than the non-normative is necessary to set the normative), and, secondly, it is a relation of realization.

Before assessing Shafer-Landau's proposal, it might be useful to say a few more words about the realization relation in metaphysics. The most straightforward definition of this relation is the following (Baysan 2015, 249):

A property *P* realizes a property *Q* if and only if each instance of *P* realizes an instance of *Q*.

And, contrary to a supervenience relation that is reflexive and non-symmetric, a realization relation is irreflexive and asymmetric.¹⁵⁸ Hence, the difference with supervenience is that normative properties cannot realize themselves (asymmetric), and that normative properties cannot realize non-normative properties if the former are realized by the latter (irreflexive). To be clear, Shafer-Landau's response to the problem of supervenience consists in a rejection of

¹⁵⁸ Both relations are transitive.

BRUTE CONNECTION as it aims at explaining the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties: the fact that non-normative properties realize normative properties explains why there is such a necessary connection between these two categories of properties.

3.5.1.2. Assessment of Shafer-Landau's Response

The main issue with Shafer-Landau's response to the problem of supervenience, and, by the same token, the main issue with arguing that supervenience can be explained by a realization relation is that it only restates in other terms the necessary connection between the normative and non-normative properties already posited by supervenience.¹⁵⁹ The only thing that a realization relation adds over a supervenience relation is a restriction that comes with the asymmetric and irreflexive character of the first relation. However, it does not seem to add anything substantial to the supervenience relation that would *explain* why there is a necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties. As McPherson notes (2012, 222): "If intended to undercut the bruteness of the necessary connection between these types of properties, this proposal is clearly inadequate: to say that certain base properties must give rise to the ethical properties is to state the necessary connection to be explained, not to explain it".

Non-naturalists, as argued by Shafer-Landau, could be right in believing that there is a metaphysical entailment going from the non-normative to the normative properties (Shafer-Landau 2003, 85, 2005, 326), but providing an explanation of why this is so is a different point than stating it. With a realization relation, Shafer-Landau is stating this entailment rather than

¹⁵⁹ Another reason to deny realization as a proper explanation of the necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative, at least for non-naturalists, is that it seems to be inconsistent with non-naturalists' commitment to normative properties as *sui generis*. We could say, for instance, that *being crimson* realizes *being red*, but in such a case the properties of *being crimson* and of *being red* are metaphysically continuous, as they should both be understood in terms of colors. Non-naturalists should then avoid appealing to a realization relation between discontinuous entities, as it adds more mystery than it is eliminating. For more on this, see Ridge (2007) and Leary (2017).

explaining it. However, the problem of supervenience consists in providing an explanation of this necessary metaphysical relation between the normative and the non-normative, and a proper denial of BRUTE CONNECTION cannot merely restate such metaphysical relation. This means that Shafer-Landau's response to the problem of supervenience fails to satisfy the second criterion, and should hence be rejected.

At this stage of the argument, it could be fair to ask if I am being too demanding regarding what a direct reply to the problem of supervenience should look like. This worry may also be supported by the idea that it is not clear that it is possible to do much better than Shafer-Landau is doing if we were trying to explain – for instance – the supervenience of biological properties upon chemical properties. However, I think it is important to point out that there is an important difference between saying that chemical properties fix biological properties (or: that biological properties are realized by chemical properties) when both are understood as metaphysically continuous, and saying that non-normative properties fix normative properties when these categories of properties are understood as metaphysically discontinuous. I think it is the fact that Shafer-Landau argues for a realization relation between metaphysically discontinuous properties that is the problem here, not the realization relation itself. In the case of metaphysically continuous properties, I believe we can think of a way for this realization relation to happen between two categories of properties (although this way may not be always very detailed). However, in the case of metaphysically discontinuous properties, I think it is very hard to think of a way for this realization relation to happen between two categories of properties insofar as we are also conjunctly trying to make sense of the fact that this relation is supposed to happen between metaphysically discontinuous properties.

3.5.2. Wielenberg's Making Relation

Similar to Shafer-Landau, Wielenberg introduces, in the first chapter of *Robust Ethics* (2014), an exhaustive constitution relation between normative and non-normative properties. Wielenberg parts ways with Shafer-Landau in the sense that the latter believes that normative properties are exhaustively constituted by descriptive properties, while the former prefers to stay non-committal regarding which non-normative properties instantiate normative properties. Furthermore, Wielenberg sees the making relation as importantly different from an exhaustive constitution relation (2014, 13, n. 20). Nevertheless, I believe we can agree that Shafer-Landau's realization relation and Wielenberg's making relation belong to the same category of metaphysical relations, as both introduce metaphysical relations that are putatively explanatory.

Wielenberg believes that there is a making relation between normative and non-normative entities. For instance, the non-normative fact that an action fails to maximize happiness *makes* that action be morally wrong (2014, 16). A making relation is distinct from supervenience as the former is – allegedly – explanatory, while the latter is not. When the instantiation of a non-normative property makes a normative property be instantiated, the instantiation of the former property explains the instantiation of the latter property. One way, maybe not perfect, to think about the difference is the following: although a normative property supervenes on a large set of non-normative properties (i.e. all the non-normative properties of an action), only some of these non-normative properties make the normative property be instantiated (i.e. the non-normative property of failing to maximize utility). In the next subsection, I will introduce Wielenberg's specific account of the making relation for normative properties: making as causation.

3.5.2.1. Making as Causing

According to Wielenberg, the making relation between normative and non-normative properties is best understood in terms of causation, although causation must be understood in a “particularly robust fashion” to make sense of this idea (2014, 18). This robust understanding of causation is constituted by three features: (i) it does not depend on the existence of laws of nature connecting causes and effects, (ii) causal connections are necessary (at least the causal connections between the normative and non-normative properties are), and (iii) the occurrences of causes and effects are simultaneous. Wielenberg appeals to the relation that some theists believe exists “between a state of affairs being divinely willed and the obtaining of that state of affairs” to sustain something similar about the relation between the normative and the non-normative (2014, 18).

As he explains (2014, 18–19):

The relation between p’s being divinely willed and p’s obtaining is a causal one of a particularly robust sort. It does not depend on the existence of a law of nature connecting acts of divine will with states of affairs (indeed, theists typically hold that whatever laws of nature hold are themselves the products of divine willing). Theists typically maintain that if God wills that p, this necessarily brings it about that p obtains. And there is no reason that acts of divine will cannot be simultaneous with their effects. Necessarily, if God wills at time t that p obtains at time t, then p obtains at time t.

Wielenberg continues by saying that one way to think about making as causation is in terms of the doctrine of divine conservation. While, according to this doctrine, God keeps in existence the things he has brought into existence for as long as they exist, normative properties are kept in existence by a robust causal relation that holds between these normative properties and the relevant non-normative properties (2014, 20). With this view of making as causation, Wielenberg believes that he can respond to the problem of supervenience. More specifically, his view can be seen as a denial of BRUTE CONNECTION, as the making relation that holds between

normative and non-normative properties would provide an explanation of the necessary connection posited by SUPERVENIENCE.¹⁶⁰

I propose to understand Wielenberg's rejection of BRUTE CONNECTION as being constituted of two steps. I am constructing this rejection from what Wielenberg says about Mark Schroeder's version of the problem of supervenience: supervenience cannot be brute. According to Wielenberg, this challenge consists in explaining why normative properties supervene upon the *relevant* non-normative properties (Wielenberg 2014, 21; Schroeder 2007, 70).¹⁶¹ It is in this context that I think Wielenberg has the resources to say something interesting against BRUTE CONNECTION.

The first step of Wielenberg's reply consists in introducing the making relation between normative and non-normative properties. For instance, we are seeking an explanation of why it is the case that the normative property moral wrongness supervenes upon the non-normative property torturing someone just for fun. Wielenberg considers he has a very straightforward explanation to offer here: the former supervenes upon the latter because an instance of torturing someone just for fun *makes* an action morally wrong. The making relation provides an explanation of why it is the case that the normative property moral wrongness supervenes upon the non-normative property torturing someone just for fun.

¹⁶⁰ As I explained in section 2.3.4, Wielenberg also believes that MODEST HUMEAN can be rejected; although I argued in that section that Wielenberg's point is not sound. It is also important to note that Wielenberg himself does not seem to consider his view as potentially being a rejection of BRUTE CONNECTION. As he says: "Thus, the response I have sketched simply substitutes brute making for brute supervenience; McPherson would likely not see this as much of an improvement" (2014, 33).

¹⁶¹ As I explained earlier, the similarity between Schroeder's challenge and McPherson's version of the problem of supervenience is striking, as McPherson is also challenging non-naturalists to explain why normative properties necessarily vary with non-normative properties.

The second step consists in denying that a further explanation of the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties is needed. As he explains (2014, 24):

Why does being an instance of torturing someone just for fun entail moral wrongness? Because being an instance of torturing someone just for fun *makes* an act wrong. But why does being an instance of torture just for fun make an act wrong? Perhaps further explanation is available: for example, perhaps torturing just for fun never maximizes utility and failing to maximize utility makes an act wrong. But why does failing to maximize utility make an act wrong? Eventually we hit bottom; no further explanation is available. But I don't see why possessing this sort of explanatory bottom is a problematic feature for a view to have.

Hence, his response to the problem of supervenience consists in introducing the making relation, and in denying that any further explanation is needed. At some point, we would not be able to explain further why it is the case that the instantiation of a non-normative property makes a normative property be instantiated. We will simply get to a basic fact about the metaphysics of normative properties that cannot be explained further. Wielenberg's view may have some merits, but it is not clear that it satisfies the two criteria a response to the problem of supervenience should.

3.5.2.2. Assessment of Wielenberg's Response

Wielenberg's response to the problem of supervenience is original and interesting, but it is also importantly underdeveloped. Hence, what I would say against this option might be best understood as being provisional, and depending on further development of the making as causation view my objection may have to be reviewed. Nevertheless, I think that right now the best thing to conclude is that making as causation fails to represent a satisfactory reply to the problem of supervenience. The reason is that it fails to satisfy the second criterion, as a making relation merely seems to reaffirm the same necessary connection posited by SUPERVENIENCE.¹⁶²

¹⁶² It might be noted that I previously maintained that Leary's response to the problem of supervenience, even if somewhat similar to Wielenberg's, fails to satisfy the *first* criterion. However, as Wielenberg's response does not

Granted, with a making relation, a more specific relation between normative and non-normative properties seems to be assumed. Nevertheless, this depends more on the examples given by Wielenberg than anything intrinsic to the making relation. Indeed, when Wielenberg is talking about making as a causation relation, he gives examples such as torturing someone just for fun makes an act wrong, while often metaethicists do not want to commit themselves too much regarding what exactly are the “real” subvenient properties. Indeed, even if moral wrongness supervenes on the set of non-normative properties *B*, it may not be the case that *every* non-normative property in *B* is “relevant” regarding moral wrongness. A making relation aims at specifying the members of *B* that are relevant to make it the case that moral wrongness is instantiated. Very importantly, specifying the non-normative properties that vary with moral wrongness does not necessarily mean that the necessary connection between these non-normative properties and moral wrongness are *explained*.

Furthermore, even if a making relation aims at being explanatory, it seems like the making relation itself is of little help explaining why there is a necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties. Indeed, if we are looking for an explanation of why it is the case – assuming it is the case – that moral wrongness necessarily varies with torturing someone just for fun, saying that this is so because the instantiation of the latter necessarily makes it the case that

introduce a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities, it cannot fail to satisfy the first criterion. Despite their similarity, Leary’s and Wielenberg’s responses are importantly dissimilar. Indeed, Leary does introduce a new category to the normative (the hybrid normative), something that Wielenberg does not do. Furthermore, by appealing to essential facts of the hybrid normative properties (facts that are also quite different from the essential facts of the *sui generis* normative properties as they specify both non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation and sufficient conditions for the instantiation of the *sui generis* normative properties), Leary’s response to the problem of supervenience does introduce a necessary connection between discontinuous entities that is distinct from the necessary connection implied by SUPERVENIENCE. This is not the case with Wielenberg’s response, and this is why his response cannot fail to satisfy the first criterion.

the former is instantiated seems of little help. In this case, the explanans seems merely to be a reaffirmation of the explanandum, although in somewhat different terms.¹⁶³

For the making relation to be explanatory, and to be pertinently different than the supervenience relation, it seems necessary to specify why torturing someone just for fun is relevant to instantiating moral wrongness. Wielenberg's solution here is to appeal to the transitive nature of the making relation: we could explain why torturing someone for fun makes it the case that this act is morally wrong by saying that torturing someone for fun always fails to maximize utility, and that failing to maximize utility always makes an act wrong. Although, he admits that we will hit a normative bedrock at some point, and that no further explanation beyond that bedrock is possible. Even then, I think Wielenberg's response misses the point: what we want to know is *why* maximizing utility makes an act wrong, and in order to explain this it seems like we need to say something like "maximizing utility is normatively relevant in determining moral wrongness", something that is itself a full-fledged normative fact.¹⁶⁴ This also suggests that maximizing utility cannot all by itself make it the case that moral wrongness is instantiated: a further fact about maximizing utility, such as that it is normatively relevant to determine moral wrongness, is also necessary.¹⁶⁵ If this is right, then the making relation all by itself is not sufficient to *explain* the relation between maximizing utility (or torturing someone just for fun) and moral wrongness.

¹⁶³ If I am right, then Wielenberg's response to the problem of supervenience is very close to Enoch's, according to which normative principles can explain supervenience. However, I argued previously – in section 3.3.1.3, and Wielenberg agrees (2014, 22–23) – that this response merely consists in a reaffirmation of the supervenience relation but in other terms.

¹⁶⁴ A similar point about grounding relation in metaethics is made by Väyrynen in (2013, 158–59, 167–69).

¹⁶⁵ Maintaining otherwise might also be inconsistent with non-naturalists' core theoretical commitment to *sui generis* normative properties. Indeed, if non-normative properties can all by themselves *make* normative properties, then the latter might be metaphysically continuous with the former. This is an important difficulty a non-naturalist like Wielenberg would have to deal with beyond the issue I discuss with his response the problem of supervenience. Hence, just as with Shafer-Landau's realization relation, Wielenberg's making relation seems inconsistent with non-naturalism.

To recapitulate, just as with Shafer-Landau's realization relation, Wielenberg's making relation fails to satisfy the second criterion: the making as causation relation merely reaffirms the same necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative properties posited by SUPERVENIENCE. Hence, it fails to represent a satisfactory denial of BRUTE CONNECTION.

3.6. Partial Constitution Relations

Contrary to an exhaustive constitution relation between the normative and the non-normative of the kind introduced by Shafer-Landau, a partial constitution relation maintains that non-normative facts cannot exhaustively constitute normative facts. The main reason to believe so would be that normative facts – perhaps something like normative principles or standards – are necessary to constitute normative facts. Hence, although they are most likely necessary, non-normative facts are not sufficient to constitute normative facts. This could represent a rejection of BRUTE CONNECTION, since a partial constitution relation could explain how it is the case that the normative necessarily varies with the non-normative. In this section, I will discuss two examples of this strategy to reject BRUTE CONNECTION. The first has been introduced by William J. FitzPatrick: a normative property is constituted both by some non-normative properties and by a relevant normative standard. Furthermore, FitzPatrick grounds the normative standards in a value laden aspect of reality; according to him, some properties are both normative and non-normative. The second option could be found in T. M. Scanlon's book *Being Realistic about Reasons*: most normative facts (what Scanlon calls *mixed* normative facts) are constituted by non-normative facts and by *pure* normative facts, facts that do not themselves vary with the non-normative. I shall argue that both examples of this strategy fail to satisfy the first criterion.

3.6.1. FitzPatrick's Partial Constitution Strategy

In “Robust Ethical Realism, Non-Naturalism, and Normativity” (2008), William J. FitzPatrick introduces a partial constitution view to explain how ethical and normative properties are instantiated. In a nutshell, his view consists in saying that normative properties are metaphysically constituted both by some natural or non-normative properties and by a relevant normative standard. For instance, the property “moral goodness” is constituted both by some non-normative properties – perhaps “maximizing utility” – and by a normative standard governing goodness. To this claim, FitzPatrick adds the following: some properties have a dual aspect, that is to say that some properties are both normative and non-normative. This is a point I will explain further in a moment, but FitzPatrick’s idea here is to argue that reality is also value laden, although this aspect of reality is not reducible to its non-value laden aspect. In the following paragraphs, I will first introduce the role FitzPatrick attributes to normative standards in the metaphysical constitution of normative properties (section 3.6.1.1), and then I will explain this idea of value laden reality (section 3.6.2.2).

3.6.1.1. Metaphysical Constitution and Normative Standards

FitzPatrick introduces his view with an example similar to the following: the computer I am using to write this dissertation is a good computer, and it is so *by virtue of* possessing some natural features. For instance: because it has a solid-state drive, it boots up quickly; because it has an Intel Core i5 processor and has 8 GB of memory, I can run many applications at the same time, including *Microsoft Word*, *Zotero*, and *Roam*, programs all essential for my writing; it has enough storage for all the philosophy papers I need; etc. All these natural features, that we can regroup under the expression “XYZ”, are what *make* my computer good. As pointed out by

FitzPatrick, it seems natural to say that my computer's goodness just *is* XYZ; that my computer's goodness is, in other terms, completely constituted by XYZ. However, this is misleading. Indeed, the fact that my computer is good does not merely consist in the fact that it has XYZ as, according to FitzPatrick, many other things could have XYZ without having the property of being good. (I am not sure that many other things that are not computers could have XYZ without being good, but we should grant this point nevertheless.) The interesting point being how, according to FitzPatrick, the goodness of my computer is constituted (2008, 186; emphasis in the original): "the fact that this computer is good consists not only in the fact that it has XYZ, but in this *together with* the fact that XYZ is such as to satisfy the *standards of goodness S* for computers".

Importantly, FitzPatrick's point is not to argue for a non-naturalist view of standards about artifacts. Most likely, these standards can be reduced to other things, such as the intentions of the creators of these artifacts. His point is rather that, structurally, normative properties such as moral and ethical properties are constituted the same way as evaluative properties of artifacts are constituted: in conjunction with some natural features and a relevant standard governing the normative property in question. In other words, referring to the natural features that make an action bad does not provide the whole story of how the badness of this action is constituted. By the same token, badness does not merely consist in those natural features. Here is how FitzPatrick explains this (2008, 187–88):

The fact that the behavior is bad consists not merely in the fact that it exhibits those natural properties as such, any more than in the case of the computer's goodness and XYZ. It consists rather in that fact together with the facts that there are appropriate standards of goodness S for human behavior and that actions that exhibit the features in the resultance base in question – the deception and intent to hurt, driven by jealousy and loathing, etc. – violate those standards.

To argue for non-naturalism, FitzPatrick adds the claim that normative standards, such as standards governing goodness for human behavior, cannot be explained in other terms than normative terms and that they are irreducibly normative.¹⁶⁶ In other words, some normative standards are not constituted by natural or non-normative facts. This is what also makes normative properties non-natural: because they are partly constituted by non-natural facts (normative standards), those properties cannot count as natural. Hence, the following is FitzPatrick's view of the metaphysical constitution of normative properties: they are not exhaustively constituted by non-normative (or natural) facts, as they are in fact constituted both by some non-normative features and by an appropriate – and normatively irreducible – standard. Obviously, a fair question to ask is “Where do normative standards have their source?”, and it is with the claim that reality is value-laden that FitzPatrick answers this question.

3.6.1.2. Reality as Value Laden

By giving money to charity last week, I did something good. The goodness of my action, according to FitzPatrick, was constituted both by some of its non-normative features and by a relevant standard governing goodness S for human behavior. But where does this normative standard S come from? For FitzPatrick, it is not necessary to posit a distinct world from the natural world to explain the source of normative standards: they come from the same world as the natural world. However, the natural world – what we should probably refer to simply as “the world” – has an irreducibly normative aspect that is only visible from an ethical (or normative) perspective. Hence, the natural or empirical sciences, in studying properties of the world such as the property of being in pain, are only discovering one aspect of it. The world can also reveal

¹⁶⁶ In a recent paper, FitzPatrick also explores the possibility that this view might be understood as naturalist. This is what he calls a “Non-Scientistic Naturalism” (forthcoming).

another dimension, although this dimension cannot be discovered from the point of view of empirical inquiry. Here is a quote from FitzPatrick that summarizes his view (2008, 195):

The metaphysical claim, then, is that many familiar facts and features of human life, behavior, and experience, which can be the subject of empirical investigation, are also *inherently value laden*, and as such are the source of objective standards of goodness for us—though the standards can be properly grasped and specified only through correct ethical reflection on these facts and features as we live, experience and reflect on human life and the best possibilities it has to offer. This means that the very features we have been calling ‘natural’ all along—features in the resultance base of ethical properties and facts, such as something’s being painful or deceptive—were never *merely* natural to begin with.

Hence, FitzPatrick’s point is that some properties of the world have a dual aspect: although they can be studied by empirical sciences, they are also inherently value laden and they are the source of objective normative standards (2008, 196). For instance, the property of being painful can be studied by empirical sciences, and these sciences will be able to discover one aspect of this property: its “purely natural” or non-normative aspect. However, the same property of being painful also has another aspect that empirical sciences cannot discover, and this other aspect is value laden and will be the source of the normative standards about pain. Importantly, FitzPatrick is not committed to the claim that *all* properties have a dual aspect, but that at least some properties are inherently value laden. In the next subsection, I will explain what FitzPatrick says about supervenience and what he could say to reject BRUTE CONNECTION.

3.6.1.3. Supervenience, Value Laden Reality, and Normative Standards

The first thing to note is that FitzPatrick sometimes appears to be discussing ascriptive supervenience, while at other times metaphysical supervenience. For instance, he says: “[that actions with the same natural profile must be judged similarly] is not mysterious because again it is simply an implication of the standard-based structure of evaluation that I have advocated for complex cases, just as it is in the case of artifacts” (2008, 197). This last quote may suggest that all FitzPatrick believes in is ascriptive supervenience, namely a relation of covariation between

types of judgments (e.g. normative and non-normative judgments). However, I think we need to be careful here, and stress that FitzPatrick also wants to vindicate metaphysical supervenience.

Indeed, he explains how his view preserves the idea that two worlds non-normatively alike will also be normatively alike. Considering that normative standards are derived from or grounded in the value laden dimension of features of the world, if w^* is non-normatively identical to w , then the same normative standards should be derivable in w and w^* . More specifically, this should follow “on the assumption that the fundamental associations I have posited between the natural and the evaluative within the value laden dual-aspect reality are metaphysically necessary” (2008, 198). However, this, as pointed by FitzPatrick himself, also raises the question of the specific role of normative standards in the constitution of normative properties. Indeed, if worlds non-normatively alike are also normatively alike, it might suggest that normative properties are completely constituted by non-normative features of the world, and then that normative standards have no role to play and that they are completely superfluous.

However, saying that normative standards are completely superfluous would be a misleading representation of FitzPatrick’s view. Indeed, in response to such an objection, he makes clear that the role of normative standards is not epistemological or heuristic, but metaphysical (2008, 201):

Part of my argument has been that a proper metaphysical explanation of ethical facts, and of how they are determined by natural facts, involves appeal to the notion of something’s measuring up to, or failing to measure up to, an appropriate set of standards of goodness for things of that kind. This is not just about *how we know* whether something is good or bad, or how we represent that fact to ourselves: it is about *what it is* for something to be good or bad, which should already be familiar from the case of artifacts.

Furthermore, FitzPatrick stresses that this notion of something’s measuring up to should be considered as being holistic, something that might help make sense of the role of normative

standards even when the idea that two worlds non-normatively alike must be normatively alike is vindicated. As he explains (2008, 202):

So the story is more holistic than anything we get focusing just on the particular features in the resultance base of a given ethical property or fact. A particular action, for example, may be bad by virtue of causing someone pain. But the link between this feature and the action's badness is not simple and direct: it goes by way of the fact that *all things considered*, this feature of the action (in its empirical aspect) makes it violate the set of ethical standards that has the content and structure it does because of the implications of the whole set of evaluative and normative properties and facts inherent in the sphere of the world with which ethics is concerned.

To recap FitzPatrick's view: some natural properties of the world also have a value laden aspect that can only be discovered through normative inquiry. Hence, FitzPatrick is committed to the idea that some features of the world are not purely natural: these features have a normative aspect to them.

Before assessing FitzPatrick's view, I think it is important to make clear that the best way to understand his view is as introducing a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities. The connection between – for instance – pain and the fact that pain has a value laden aspect to it is indeed not the same as the connection posited by the relation of supervenience. This latest relation arrives at the more holistic level, something that also involves normative standards, themselves grounded or derived from the value laden aspect of the properties that have this characteristic. Hence, the fact that *badness* supervenes upon *painfulness* – assuming it does – must be differentiated from the fact that *painfulness* has also a value laden aspect to it. The specific instantiation of *badness* will have to be explained by some non-normative features of an action (assuming we are talking about an action here), most likely including *painfulness*, plus a normative standard governing goodness that this action fails to satisfy. Hence, my understanding of FitzPatrick's partial constitution view is that normative properties are partly constituted by non-normative features, and partly constituted by normative standards. These

standards are derived from natural features of the world that are also value laden, but these value laden features are not themselves sufficient to constitute instances of normative properties since it is a holistic matter.

To conclude, this should count as a rejection of BRUTE CONNECTION considering that it represents an explanation of the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties. This connection will not be brute since it will be explained by normative standards. In the next subsection, I shall argue that FitzPatrick's response to the problem of supervenience fails to satisfy the first criterion, as it introduces a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities that is not properly explained or justified.

3.6.1.4. Assessment of FitzPatrick's Response

As I explained in the previous section, I consider that the proper understanding of FitzPatrick's view implies that he is committed to a new metaphysically necessary connection between entities that are metaphysically discontinuous with each other.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, the value laden aspect of some natural properties cannot be reduced to the non-value laden or to the non-normative aspect of these features, just as it cannot be understood in the terms used to understand the non-normative aspect of these features (e.g. in the terms of the empirical sciences). In this sense, the value laden aspect that some lucky natural properties have is metaphysically discontinuous with the non-normative aspect of these same properties. Hence, FitzPatrick's response to the problem of supervenience introduces a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities, namely between the value laden and the non-value laden aspects of some natural properties.

¹⁶⁷ Depending on how we understand "entities", FitzPatrick may not be committed to a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities. Here, I adopt a very liberal use of this term, as FitzPatrick is nevertheless committed to new a necessary connection between features – or stuff – that are metaphysically discontinuous with each other.

This is also something that FitzPatrick seems to acknowledge (2008, 197):

But now I have said that the standards are themselves just a function of a structure of values inherent in the same single reality. One question this raises is whether I have just shifted the mystery by appealing to a *fundamental association* of certain value features with certain natural features. For example, I said above that the empirical property of being painful is also value laden, pain being something bad and typically to be avoided or mitigated. I take this to be a fundamental metaphysical association: it's just part of what pain is that it has this value laden aspect. Similarly with deception. So if these sorts of connections are among those that people find mysterious when they speak of supervenience, then it is true that I have done nothing to lessen that mystery. My view is that certain elements of the world just are value laden in this way, as a basic metaphysical fact about them, and that there may not be anything more for philosophy to say here.

Furthermore, FitzPatrick has to see this connection as being metaphysically necessary, something that he also acknowledges. I quoted him saying it in the previous subsection, but here is the whole quote that is relevant regarding this issue (2008, 198):

[I]f, as I have proposed the standards of ethics are derived from the evaluative dimension of some of those natural properties and facts, then the same ethical standards will obtain in *w* and *w** and they be alike ethically. Or at least this follows on the assumption that the fundamental associations I have posited between the natural and the evaluative within the value laden dual-aspect reality are metaphysically necessary.

Hence, FitzPatrick's response to the problem of supervenience introduces a new metaphysically necessary connection between discontinuous entities. FitzPatrick does not try to explain it, but he tries to justify why he cannot; something already perceivable in FitzPatrick's quote from p. 197 I just introduced. In a nutshell, FitzPatrick's justification not to explain this new necessary connection is that it represents a basic metaphysical fact about certain elements of the world. Indeed, it is a basic metaphysical fact that, for instance, painfulness is also value laden. This means that this necessary connection is left unexplained, as, FitzPatrick argues, there is not much to say about it. Also, the most natural candidate to explain this necessary connection cannot help here: indeed, we cannot appeal to normative standards to explain it, as they are themselves derived from the value laden aspect of these elements of the world.

The main issue with FitzPatrick's justification for not having to explain this new necessary connection is that it seems to be completely *ad hoc*. This point is, at least in part, supported by the fact that, while some features of the world are value laden, many are not. According to FitzPatrick, this fact should not be surprising. As he says (2008, 200):

[I]t is hardly a great mystery why we might take something like the property of being painful or deceptive to be value laden, while denying that the property of being flat or larger than the sun is not. While there is no general formula for determining which aspects of nature are value laden in the way I have proposed, a plausible start is to suggest that this is limited to the sphere of sentient and rational experience, capacities, interactions, and so on. This is still too broad, of course, but reflection on our own substantive experience of value can guide us here in ways that are no more arbitrary than our use of ethical language itself is.

This clarification may appear quite convincing to us, but I think this is so because it heavily depends on our normative standards. Indeed, the reason why we take the property of being painful but not the property of being flat to be value laden is that we have some normative standards governing the normative relevance of being painful, while we do not have any normative standards governing the normative relevance of being flat. However, FitzPatrick's justification cannot rely on our normative standards, as these very same standards are grounded in these features of the world that are value laden. Arguing otherwise would be completely circular, and, in this case, it looks like this circular explanation is not virtuous. To recap, my point is that the idea that only the features related to sentient and rational experience are value laden is not something independent from our normative standards, and so fails to justify why only these features of the world will also be value laden. Indeed, this explanation is circular, and it does not look like a virtuous circle.

Before moving on, it is important to stress that my point of objection to FitzPatrick's view may appear to be rather weak, and that it may appear to some that the necessary connection he introduces between the value laden and the non-normative aspect of some features of the world should not be understood as being worrying. However, insofar as the brute necessary connection

between discontinuous entities posited by SUPERVENIENCE is considered problematic, we should be skeptical of a strategy that introduces a new necessary connection between other discontinuous entities.

3.6.2. Scanlon's Partial Constitution Strategy

In *Being Realistic about Reasons* (2014), Scanlon argues for *Reasons Fundamentalism*, a view according to which truths about *reasons* cannot be reduced to other truths, such as truths about natural or non-normative facts. Here is how Scanlon understands this view (2014, 2):

I will maintain that truths about reasons are not reducible or identifiable with non-normative truths, such as truths about the natural world of physical objects, causes and effects, nor can they be explained in terms of notions of rationality or rational agency that are not themselves claims about reasons.¹⁶⁸

Considering Scanlon tends to agree with a minimalist understanding of normative properties, it might not be clear that Scanlon is a non-naturalist as this view has been defined in the first chapter (2014, 42–52). Nevertheless, he introduces a response to the problem of supervenience that is worth exploring. Before introducing Scanlon's take on the problem of supervenience, it is necessary to say a few words about his view of *reasons*.

3.6.2.1. Scanlon's *Reasons Fundamentalism*

It is generally admitted that a reason can be understood as a consideration that counts in favor of something, such as an action or an attitude.¹⁶⁹ For instance, if I have a reason to buy milk (maybe because I like to drink milk before going to bed and I do not have milk at home), this

¹⁶⁸ There is also, as Scanlon notes, a further sense in which reasons might be fundamental: by being the elements by which the other normative elements (wrongness, goodness, etc.) are analyzable. Scanlon is inclined to agree with this view, but he does not argue for it in *Being Realistic about Reasons*.

¹⁶⁹ Indeed, a consideration could be a reason for an action or a reason for an attitude, such as a belief. In the rest of this section, I will only discuss reasons that are reasons for action.

consideration counts in favor of an action: me stopping at the convenience store to buy milk. According to Scanlon, the property of being a reason is best understood as being a four-place relation, $R(p, x, c, a)$: a reason is a relation that holds between a fact p , an agent x , a set of conditions or circumstances c , and an action or attitude a (2014, 31). To take one of Scanlon's examples: the fact that the building is burning (p) is a reason for Jones (x) in his circumstances (c) to leave the building right now (a).

In this case, there are different ways to describe Jones' circumstances. For instance, we may say that Jones' circumstances are such that he has children to take care of, giving him a reason to pursue his life; or that he is the Prime Minister of Canada and that he has important social reforms to put in place, once again giving him a reason to pursue his life. However, no matter how we decide to unwrap these circumstances, it seems like they are supporting the fact that the building being on fire is a reason for Jones to leave it right now.

An important element of Scanlon's view about reasons is that they have no "hidden nature",¹⁷⁰ which means that we cannot analyze or understand a reason for x to do a in other terms than in the terms of a reason for x to do a . It is in this context that Scanlon maintains that "the relation that holds between an agent and a consideration X in such a situation just *is* the relation of p 's *being a reason for that agent to do a* " (2014, 10). In other words, nothing further could be said about a consideration except that it is the four-place relation that does constitute what it is for something to be a reason. Hence, if we say that there is a relation that is holding between Jones and the consideration *that the building is on fire*, there is nothing we could say about this relation beyond that it is the relation *that the building being on fire is a reason for Jones (in his circumstances) to leave it right now*. It is in this sense that reasons are *fundamental*:

¹⁷⁰ I take this expression of reasons having no hidden nature from Rosen (2017c, 864).

they cannot be explained in terms that are not themselves about reasons. Scanlon adds later (2014, 44):

If the concept of a reason is that of a consideration that ‘counts in favor of’ something for an agent in certain circumstances, the further explanation might be an explanation of what ‘counting in favor of’ amounts to. This might take the form of an explanation of the ‘grip’ or ‘authority’ of reasons, of the kind offered by the Kantians and others, who believe that the authority of reasons can be grounded in an idea of rationality [...]. As I have said, however, it seems to me that no such further explanation of reasons need or can be given: the ‘grip’ that a consideration that is a reason has on a person for whom it is a reason is just being a reason for him or her.

I take this to mean here that, for Scanlon, reasons have no hidden nature; or, in other words, that there is no further explanation we could give to the property of being a reason than it is a reason for an agent to do something.

Indeed, while the Kantians could explain (or ground) reasons in terms of claims about rationality, this move is not available to Scanlon as he believes that reasons cannot be explained (or grounded) in other terms than “reasons-terms”. This could be compared to what Scanlon says about “thicker” normative notions, such as moral wrongness. For instance, he says that “[t]here is more to be said about what makes something morally wrong, and the task of giving this further account might be said to be the task of characterizing the property of moral wrongness” (2014, 44). About moral wrongness, Scanlon says that we could characterize this normative notion, and we could even do so in other terms than in terms involving moral wrongness; which does not mean that we could do it in other terms than in *normative terms*. Hence, Scanlon’s point here is not that no normative notion can be characterized, but that *reasons* themselves cannot be characterized in other terms than in terms about reasons.

3.6.2.2. Scanlon’s Response to the Problem of Supervenience

It seems undeniable that the fact that the building is burning is a reason for Jones to leave the building varies with non-normative facts, such as the fact that the building is burning and some

other non-normative facts about Jones's circumstances (2014, 39). Indeed, if Jones's circumstances are such that he has no reason to pursue his life (assuming we do not have an all things considered reason to always pursue our life), then the fact that the building is burning may not be a reason for him to jump. Hence, if the non-normative facts were different, the fact that he has a reason to leave the building (a normative fact) may also be different. Whether it will be different will depend on the context, as Jones may still have a reason to leave the building even if it is not burning (e.g. the building could be under a bomb threat).

I propose to understand Scanlon's response to the problem of supervenience as being constituted of two distinct steps. The first step is hidden in the following quote from Scanlon: "the problem is to explain why it is the case, if normative truths are not logically or conceptually tied to non-normative truths, that *most* normative facts nonetheless vary as non-normative facts vary, and cannot vary when non-normative facts do not vary" (2014, 40; emphasis is mine). Indeed, Scanlon's first step is to deny that *all* normative facts supervene upon non-normative facts. Indeed, he takes the relation of supervenience to hold between *most* normative facts and non-normative facts, rather than being between *all* normative facts and non-normative facts. There is then a category of normative facts that is "privileged", as these facts do not vary with non-normative facts.¹⁷¹ This also means that, at least according to Scanlon, the issue with supervenience does not consist in explaining why all normative facts supervene upon non-normative facts, but rather in why some normative facts supervene upon non-normative facts.

The second step of Scanlon's response to the problem of supervenience consists in introducing a distinction between pure and mixed normative claims, a distinction that will be

¹⁷¹ This is an uncommon characterization of the supervenience of the normative upon the non-normative, as it is usually assumed that *all* normative facts supervene upon non-normative facts. Scanlon's idea may also be understood as a rejection of SUPERVENIENCE. This possibility, among others to reject SUPERVENIENCE, will be discussed in the next chapter.

used to explain how *some* normative facts supervene upon non-normative facts.¹⁷² The main difference between pure and mixed normative facts lies in how these claims are made true and how their truth value varies: while the truth of mixed normative claims varies with non-normative facts, the truth of pure normative claims cannot vary (2014, 40–41). That the truth of mixed normative claims varies with non-normative facts is explained by what makes these claims true, namely some non-normative facts *in conjunction with* a pure normative fact. For instance, assuming that the claim “*a* is morally wrong” is a mixed normative claim, it is made true by some non-normative facts about *a* (maybe the non-normative fact that it fails to maximize happiness) and a pure normative fact (maybe the principle that every action that fails to maximize happiness is morally wrong). However, the truth of a pure normative claim, for Scanlon, does not and cannot vary. If true, a pure normative claim will stay true no matter what is happening at the non-normative level.

Scanlon’s response to the problem of supervenience joins these two distinct steps together to argue, firstly, that only mixed normative facts supervene upon non-normative facts, and, secondly, that this is explained by pure normative facts. To see how pure normative facts may explain why mixed normative facts supervene upon non-normative facts, it is useful to go over Jones’ case in further detail (2014, 39).

First, a non-normative claim about Jones’ situation:

(1) If Jones does not leave the burning building right now, he will be killed.

(1) is a non-normative claim, as it states a natural fact about Jones’ situation. This claim simply states things about the non-normative or natural situation in which Jones is. Now, consider the following claim:

¹⁷² I assume here that this distinction is exhaustive, and hence that every normative claim is either pure or mixed, and that no normative claim is neither pure nor mixed.

(2) Jones has a reason to leave the building right now.

This is a normative claim, because it is about a normative fact regarding Jones: the fact that he has a *reason* to leave the building right now. For Scanlon, (2) is a *mixed* normative claim. Why? Because it is also a claim about some non-normative facts, namely that the building is burning and that if Jones does not leave it right now, he will be killed. If the non-normative facts had been different, the truth of (2) may have been different too. For instance, if it were not a fact that the building is burning right now, then (2) may not be true. Of course, depending on the context, (2) may still be true; but this will – partly – depend on some other non-normative facts. Hence, (2) is a mixed normative claim as, by definition, it cannot be a pure normative claim. However, the truth of (2) does not *only* depend on some non-normative facts: it also depends on a *pure* normative fact. Indeed, (2), if true, is made true by the conjunction of two things: some non-normative facts and a pure normative fact.

Interestingly, in *Being Realistic about Reasons*, Scanlon does not provide a clear example of a pure normative claim. For instance, he introduces the following claim that is, according to him, still a mixed normative claim (2014, 39):

(3) Jones's situation is such that the fact that doing *a* is necessary for him to avoid dying now is a reason for him to do *a*.

The reason why (3) is still a mixed normative claim is that it involves a claim about Jones's circumstances. Indeed, *if* Jones's circumstances were different, the truth value of (3) may change. Hence, (3) is not a pure normative claim. Scanlon nevertheless believes that, if we purify (3) of all the non-normative facts about Jones, we will get a pure normative claim (2014, 39). In his response to critics, he introduces the following claim that he considers as a pure normative claim (2017, 884):

(4) *Were* it to be the case that *p* and that *x* is in circumstances *c*, then *p* would be a reason for *x* to do *a*.

Hence, we now have a claim that is purified of non-normative facts about Jones, and that does not vary with these facts. By consequence, (4) is a pure normative claim. Obviously, (4) is also quite formal, but this is not what makes (4) pure; (4) is pure *because* it does not and cannot vary with non-normative facts. Hence, it is possible to imagine – even if Scanlon does not introduce such claims – less formal claims that could be pure if they do not vary with non-normative facts.

As explained previously, Scanlon's first move to respond to the challenge of supervenience is to deny that *all* normative facts supervene upon non-normative facts, and hence to deny that all normative facts must vary with non-normative facts. Scanlon's second move is to introduce a distinction between pure and mixed normative facts. Pure normative facts, such as (4), do not vary at all; if true, (4) is true no matter the non-normative facts. But what about mixed normative facts, that do indeed supervene upon and vary with non-normative facts? This is explained by pure normative facts (2014, 40). Indeed, the fact that (2) varies with (1) is explained by (4), which says that anyone in these circumstances – Jones's circumstances, whatever they are – has a reason to do *a* – to leave the building right now. And because pure normative claims do not supervene upon non-normative facts, this is the end of the story: there is no phenomenon of variation with non-normative facts to be explained beyond the variation of mixed normative facts with non-normative facts, which is precisely explained by pure normative facts.

Assuming for now that Scanlon agrees with SUPERVENIENCE,¹⁷³ it is now possible to see how he could deny BRUTE CONNECTION. Indeed, Scanlon would not have to take the supervenience of the normative properties on the non-normative properties to involve a brute necessary connection between discontinuous properties, as this necessary connection is explained by some normative properties (or facts) that do not themselves supervene upon non-

¹⁷³ This assumption will be questioned in the next chapter.

normative properties. In the next subsection, I will assess Scanlon's normative explanation of supervenience. The main issue with Scanlon's response is that it does not satisfy the first criterion any response to the problem of supervenience should satisfy.

3.6.2.3. Assessment of Scanlon's Response

To assess Scanlon's explanation of supervenience, it is useful to introduce a more specific example of how a pure normative claim could explain why mixed normative facts supervene upon non-normative facts (at the end of this section, I will discuss whether the use of this more specific example is fair to Scanlon). I take the following example from Enoch and McPherson's paper on Scanlon's book, "What Do You Mean 'This Isn't the Question'?", as they propose to assume that the following pure normative claim is true (2017, 832):

UTILITARIANISM: One ought to perform the act, among one's options, that maximizes net pleasure.

The first thing to note is that UTILITARIANISM is not a claim about reasons, or at least not directly. Nevertheless, it could become a claim about reasons if we replace "one ought to perform the act..." by "one has a conclusive reason to perform the act...".¹⁷⁴ Hence, if we were to believe in *Reasons Fundamentalism*, we would prefer this instance of UTILITARIANISM:

UTILITARIANISM: One has a conclusive reason to perform the act, among one's options, that maximizes net pleasure.

With this formulation of UTILITARIANISM, what one ought to do would be understood in terms of what one has a conclusive reason to do. However, we should not get bogged down with the details of how UTILITARIANISM is best phrased; what matters is that it is a useful example to clarify the difference between pure and mixed normative claims and the role of pure normative

¹⁷⁴ I think it is necessary to understand UTILITARIANISM in terms of conclusive reason rather than *pro tanto* reason, as we usually assume that only one first-order normative theory could be true and as utilitarianism seems best understood as a monistic view of our normative or moral obligations (our duty being to maximize net pleasure).

claims in explaining supervenience. In order to do this, we need to assume two things: (1) UTILITARIANISM is the fundamental truth about our reasons and (2) pleasure is a non-normative property¹⁷⁵ (Enoch and McPherson 2017, 832).

If UTILITARIANISM is a pure normative claim, then it does not vary with non-normative facts. Furthermore, it has the feature of making – in combination with non-normative facts – mixed non-normative claims about our reasons true. Hence, if giving money to charity is, among Steve’s options, the action that maximizes net pleasure, then Steve has a reason to give money to charity. And the fact that Steve has a reason to give money to charity is partly made true by UTILITARIANISM. The fact that Steve has a reason to give money to charity supervenes upon some non-normative facts (whatever they are), and this is, Scanlon would say, explained by the truth of UTILITARIANISM.

Enoch and McPherson are very straightforward in saying that Scanlon’s explanation of supervenience is not satisfactory. As they say (2017, 833):

We do not, however, think that Scanlon’s explanation does everything we should want. For in order for the explanation of the mixed normative claims to work, there must be a pure normative property or relation (in our example: obligatoriness [or: being a conclusive reason]) that is necessarily coextensive with a non-normative property or relation (in our example: pleasure-maximization). If one was puzzled *at all* by the covariance of the normative and the non-normative, it is very hard to understand how explaining such covariation by committing oneself to an underlying necessary covariation between obligatoriness and pleasure-maximization is going to help. For one would thereby have solved the initial problem by positing exactly the same sort of ‘puzzling’ modal relation to do the explanatory work.

I think there are two ways Enoch and McPherson’s point could be understood, each way corresponding to one of the two criteria a response to the problem of supervenience should satisfy. It is possible to say that Scanlon’s explanation just reaffirms the same necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties posited by SUPERVENIENCE. This

¹⁷⁵ If pleasure were a normative property, then it seems like UTILITARIANISM would fail to relate mixed normative claims to non-normative claims.

would mean that Scanlon's response fails to satisfy the second criterion. This might be Enoch and McPherson's point, and if it is, then it could be a good enough reason to reject Scanlon's explanation. Indeed, if all he is doing is reaffirming the same necessary connection, then he has explained nothing. However, I think Enoch and McPherson's objection is best understood as being about the first criterion, that is to say about the fact that Scanlon's response introduces a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities. Indeed, they are clear in pointing out that Scanlon's response to the problem of supervenience seems to imply an underlying necessary connection between obligatoriness and pleasure-maximization. Furthermore, this connection between obligatoriness and pleasure-maximization is best understood as being beyond the scope of SUPERVENIENCE as, according to Scanlon, a claim such as UTILITARIANISM does not supervene upon non-normative facts.

Interestingly, Scanlon, in his reply to Enoch and McPherson, does not seem bothered too much by their objection. One reason that could explain this is that Scanlon seems to understand Enoch and McPherson's objection as being about the second criterion: his explanation of supervenience would merely reaffirm the same necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties (2017, 894). But, Scanlon says, this cannot be a problem since it is not the case that the entire normative domain varies with or supervenes upon the non-normative domain. Only a subset of the normative domain supervenes upon the non-normative, namely the subset constituted of all the mixed normative claims. Accordingly, it would be misleading to believe – as Scanlon thinks Enoch and McPherson are suggesting – that he reaffirms the same necessary connection posited by SUPERVENIENCE, since this necessary connection only holds

between mixed normative facts and non-normative facts.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, Scanlon could not reaffirm the same necessary connection with his use of pure normative facts, as these facts hold “above” the supervenience relation, which would only hold between mixed normative facts and non-normative facts if Scanlon is right. Hence, if Enoch and McPherson’s objection to Scanlon’s explanation of supervenience is understood as I think it should be, then it is about the fact that Scanlon’s explanation fails to satisfy the first, not the second, criterion.

According to this criterion, if a response to the problem of supervenience implies a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities, then either an explanation of it or a justification of why no explanation is possible should be provided. This is precisely the point Scanlon seems to miss in his reply to Enoch and McPherson: he is committed to a necessary connection – assuming that the first instance of UTILITARIANISM is correct – between obligatoriness on the one hand and pleasure-maximization on the other hand. First, it appears like Scanlon cannot provide an explanation of this new necessary connection. Indeed, if pure normative claims such as UTILITARIANISM are understood as claims about reasons, and if they constitute the fundamental normative truths, then it seems like – given Scanlon’s commitments to the idea that reason has no hidden nature – they cannot be explained. Indeed, if pure claims about reasons have no hidden nature (or: if the fundamental normative entities, whatever they are, have no hidden nature), as I explained in section 3.6.2.1, then one option for satisfying the first criterion – namely, explaining this new necessary connection – is not available to Scanlon.

The second option available to Scanlon would be to justify why it is not possible to explain this new necessary connection between obligatoriness and pleasure-maximization. About this

¹⁷⁶ In all fairness to Scanlon, he acknowledges that his explanation of supervenience might not be an explanation of supervenience as it is usually – but misleadingly, according to him – understood (2017, 894). I will further discuss this point in the next chapter.

point, it seems likely that Scanlon would dig his heels in, and just repeat that this necessary connection is a fundamental and necessary feature of the normative domain. More specifically, he could say that it is an essential feature of pure normative claims that they assign normative significance to situations (2017, 894). Hence, insofar as these claims are necessary, they also imply necessary connections between discontinuous entities. This is just a basic and unexplainable feature of the normative domain. However, this justification overlooks the real issue with the problem of supervenience: a necessary connection between discontinuous entities is hard to believe. Hence, this is the issue with Scanlon's justification: it ignores what is, as a matter of fact, problematic with the relation of supervenience between the normative and the non-normative. For this reason, I conclude that Scanlon's response to the problem of supervenience should not be maintained.

Nevertheless, Scanlon could reply that the example used in this section – UTILITARIANISM – is unfair to his view, as it does implicitly and inevitably suggest a necessary connection between discontinuous entities. Hence, Scanlon could recall his (only) example of a pure normative claim:

(4) *Were it to be the case that p and that x is in circumstances c , then p would be a reason for x to do a .*

Then, he could say that this example does not imply any necessary connection between discontinuous entities. This is a fair point, but I think it illustrates perfectly one of the biggest issues with Scanlon's view. He needs pure normative claims to be something other than being purely formal claims, as they are the claims that *explain* why mixed normative facts vary with non-normative facts. However, (4), as stated by Scanlon, seems in fact too formal to be explanatory. Maybe there is a way for Scanlon to have his cake and eat it too, in the sense that there could be examples of pure normative claims that are not too formal and that would not

imply necessary connections between discontinuous entities. Such an example, it is important to stress, would need to be something very special, as it would have to be able to explain why mixed normative facts vary with non-normative facts without suggesting a necessary connection between these discontinuous entities. I thus stand my ground: I think Scanlon's response to the problem of supervenience should not be maintained. However, as I mentioned earlier, a different reading of Scanlon's view is available, a reading according to which he is in fact not trying to explain supervenience, but rather denying it. This possibility will be discussed, along with other possibilities, in the next chapter.

To recap, in this chapter, I have discussed replies to the problem of supervenience that were all attempts to deny BRUTE CONNECTION. If the (inductive) argument deployed in this chapter is convincing, then I think it is likely that non-naturalists *cannot* respond to the problem of supervenience by denying BRUTE CONNECTION. Nevertheless, from this alone, we cannot conclude that non-naturalists cannot respond to the problem of supervenience. Indeed, although SUPERVENIENCE seems to be supported by strong intuitions, it is possible that these intuitions are misleading, or that SUPERVENIENCE is not the best way to cash out these intuitions. In other words, it is possible to doubt the truthfulness of SUPERVENIENCE, and hence deny that claim. This will be the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Indirect Replies to the Problem of Supervenience

There are many ways for non-naturalists to introduce an indirect reply to the problem of supervenience. To be clear, I understand as an indirect reply to the problem of supervenience any attempt to reply to it that does not try to deny BRUTE CONNECTION. This leaves us with two options, either denying SUPERVENIENCE or denying MODEST HUMEAN. I have argued in section 2.3.4 that the best (and probably the only) attempt to deny MODEST HUMEAN is not successful, and as I do not see any other possibility to deny this claim, I think it is safe to say that it will be very hard for non-naturalists to respond to the problem of supervenience by denying MODEST HUMEAN. Hence, the best option to develop an indirect reply to the problem of supervenience consists in denying SUPERVENIENCE. Importantly, as a supervenience claim about normativity is accepted by almost all metaethicists, I will understand any attempt to deny SUPERVENIENCE as either an attempt to ease the worries with this claim or as an attempt to reject it and replace it by something else. My thesis in this chapter is disjunctive: either an attempt to deny SUPERVENIENCE does not go far enough, and hence fails to deal with the core of the problem, or there is an important price to pay in denying SUPERVENIENCE.

In this chapter, I will discuss three indirect strategies to deny Supervenience. The first strategy, the “holist strategy”, consists in denying a strong individual supervenience claim. I will argue that this strategy has nothing to say against SUPERVENIENCE when it is understood as a global supervenience claim. Hence, this strategy does not go far enough.

The second strategy, the “weaker is better strategy”, can be understood in two ways. The first understanding consists in replacing SUPERVENIENCE by a weak supervenience claim, a claim according to which the necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative is only true in that world. I will argue that a weak supervenience claim is not very useful, since it

fails to account for some intrinsic features of normativity and of normative thinking, such as our uses of interworld counterfactuals in apprehending normative truths. Furthermore, anybody maintaining a weak supervenience claim about the normative will also face an explanatory burden, consisting in explaining why a necessary connection true in one world is possibly not true in other worlds. The second understanding of this strategy consists in denying any kind of necessary connection (interworld or intraworld) between the normative and the non-normative, and to maintain instead a “constant conjunction” claim between the normative and the non-normative. I will argue that this strategy faces some important difficulties.

The third strategy, the “strong contingency strategy”, appears to be the most interesting option to deny SUPERVENIENCE. It basically consists in replacing SUPERVENIENCE by a weaker claim, according to which normative facts have a *sui generis* kind of necessity. This option was first introduced by Kit Fine, and has recently been supported by Gideon Rosen and to some extent by Anandi Hattiangadi. As this strategy is the most serious candidate to deny SUPERVENIENCE, most of this chapter will be focusing on it. I will argue that this strategy also faces important difficulties. My argument should be understood as being that, *if* even this very serious strategy does not work, then we are justified in believing that non-naturalists cannot successfully deny SUPERVENIENCE.

4.1. The Holist Strategy

The holist strategy is best understood as a mild attempt to deny SUPERVENIENCE. It is the strategy introduced by some, if not most, particularists about the normative to reject a strong individual or local supervenience claim in metaethics (Dancy 1983, 1993, 1995, 2004; Roberts 2011, 2017).¹⁷⁷ More specifically, particularists do not necessarily deny that a strong individual supervenience claim can be true about the normative, but they insist that *if* such a claim is true, then it is a trivial and uninteresting claim. In the next subsection, I will briefly explain this strategy and, in section 4.2.2, I will argue that holists and particularists do not have what it takes to deny a global supervenience claim about the normative (they may even maintain such a claim). Hence, I will argue that this strategy cannot be a full-fledged rejection of SUPERVENIENCE, and that it does not go far enough to really respond to the core of the problem of supervenience.

4.1.1. Holism, Shapelessness, and the Triviality of a Strong Individual Supervenience Claim

Particularism in metaethics is best understood as the claim that normative or moral principles are not necessary for the possibility of normative or moral thought. Particularists could maintain different versions of this claim, ranging from: principles are neither necessary nor useful, to: principles are not necessary but could nevertheless be useful. Nonetheless, all particularists agree in their rejection of strong and robust normative principles – what Debbie Roberts calls “snappy

¹⁷⁷ It is often said that particularists reject supervenience *tout court*. As I will show in this section, it is far from clear that this is so. Indeed, when understood as ontological supervenience, particularists usually deny individual supervenience (for reasons to be explained later). They may also deny any form of ascriptive supervenience (both individual and global). For instance, Joseph Raz has expressed some important doubts about global supervenience, but these doubts seem more directed towards the supervenience of evaluative concepts upon non-evaluative concepts, even if he says that they are also directed towards properties (2000, 49–55). He might be right that ascriptive supervenience is false (Roberts also supports this point (2011, 515)), but this form of supervenience is not part of the problem of supervenience. James Griffin has also expressed some doubts about supervenience, but his understanding of supervenience lies on the side of individual supervenience, not global (1992, 1996, 44–48). Hence, it is far from being obvious that particularists reject a global and ontological supervenience claim.

principles” (2017, 215). It is specifically this denial of “snappy principles” that allows particularists and holists to deny the possibility of a non-trivial strong individual supervenience claim about the normative. This denial of “snappy principles” is also mainly supported by two claims about the normative: holism in the theory of reasons and the shapelessness of the normative with respect to the non-normative.

Holism is the view according to which “a feature that is a reason in one case may be no reason at all, or an opposite reason, in another” (Dancy 2004, 73). In other words, according to holists, it is not the case that a feature, in this case a non-normative feature, will always ground the same reason or the same normative property in every case. For instance, even if the fact that the action *A* maximizes utility is the feature that makes *A* right, an action *B* could have this non-normative feature of maximizing utility without making *B* right. Holism must then be distinguished from atomism about reasons, the view that the “normative valence”¹⁷⁸ of non-normative features is the same in every case. According to such a view, if maximizing happiness is a feature that makes an action wrong in one case, then in all possible cases this same feature will make an action wrong.

Here, it is useful to use the notions of *pro tanto* and *all things considered* reasons, as holism is more radical than it might first look. Indeed, holists are not only maintaining that a feature that is an *all things considered* reason in one case may not be an *all things considered* reason in another,¹⁷⁹ they maintain that a feature that is a *pro tanto* reason in one case may either not be a *pro tanto* reason to do something in another case, or even be a *pro tanto* reason not to do something. Hence, following holists, we should say that the same feature (e.g. maximizing

¹⁷⁸ I take this idea of “valence” from McNaughton and Rawling (2000, 257–58) and Little (2000, 280).

¹⁷⁹ As far as I know, atomists about reasons could also maintain this claim.

happiness), even if it is a *pro tanto* reason to do *A*, may be a *pro tanto* reason *not* to do *B*. This is what Roberts calls RADICAL HOLISM (2017, 210):

RADICAL HOLISM: The properties that make, for example, an act wrong in one case may not be wrong-makers and may even make for a different normative property in a different case.

A consequence of RADICAL HOLISM is that no non-normative property always has the same normative valence. This claim also supports the idea that the normative is shapeless with respect to the non-normative, that is to say that there is no clear or real pattern in the non-normative properties upon which the normative properties supervene.¹⁸⁰ Such a pattern could provide a sense of resemblance between all the non-normative properties upon which, for instance, wrongness supervenes. This sense of resemblance could also point towards a normative principle, although it may take a very complex form. For particularists, it is not possible to discover such a pattern, other than “it is the non-normative properties upon which wrongness supervenes”. In other words, this pattern can only be found at the normative level and can only be expressed by using normative terms (Dancy 2004, 110).

It is now possible to see why particularists and holists maintain that a strong individual claim about the normative must be trivial if true, as sharing local non-normative properties is not enough to guarantee that normative properties will also be shared. Hence, two actions numerically distinct could share the same local non-normative properties, but given holism about reasons and shapelessness, this does not imply that these actions will also share the same normative properties. As Dancy states, for the claim that “two identical actions in their non-normative respects must also be normatively identical” to be true, it must be trivial as the only

¹⁸⁰ As far as I know, this idea was first introduced by McDowell (1981). I have already referred to this idea in sections 1.1 and 3.4.1.1.

way to make this claim true is to assume that these actions are *not* numerically distinct (Dancy 2004, 86–87).

To make this point clear, considering the holism of normative reasons and of normative properties and the shapelessness of the normative with respect to the non-normative, in order for two actions to be normatively identical, these actions will also need to be numerically identical. If these actions are not numerically identical, then the context between *A* and *B* may be different, and even if, for instance, both actions maximize happiness (or if both actions share the same local non-normative properties), it does not mean that this feature has the same normative valence in both cases.¹⁸¹ Indeed, if we take RADICAL HOLISM seriously, then we need to agree that the non-normative features that make the action *A* having a specific normative feature may not make *B* having this same normative feature. If these actions are numerically identical, then they are, although trivially, normatively identical. That means that a strong individual claim about the normative will necessarily be, if true, trivially true.¹⁸² However, it does not mean that we cannot provide a narrower set of non-normative properties that make a specific action wrong – this is what Dancy calls the “resultance base” (2004, 85–89) – just that there is no guarantee that this same set of normative properties will always make an action wrong.

¹⁸¹ It is not necessary to go in the details, but Dancy has developed a complete view about enablers and disablers to explain how a non-normative property that makes an action *A* wrong may not make an action *B* wrong. For more on this, see Chapter 3 of *Ethics Without Principles*. This view about enablers and disablers allows Dancy to maintain a “resultance” relation distinct from the supervenience relation. Dancy’s understanding of the resultance relation is exactly this idea that a non-normative feature may make an action *A* wrong without always making other actions wrong.

¹⁸² Dancy, obviously, acknowledges that we should try to avoid introducing such a trivial claim, but he is also stressing that, insofar as we talk about a strong individual supervenience claim, the only way to make such a claim true is to make it trivial.

4.2.2. *Missing the Target: No Denial of Global Supervenience*

The main issue with the holist strategy is that it does not go far enough to respond to the problem of supervenience as it has been introduced in the second chapter. The reason why this is so is that holists cannot (and do not) deny global supervenience, and they cannot make this claim less problematic. Therefore, they are still committed to the problematic necessary metaphysical connection between the normative and the non-normative, although at the level of whole worlds rather than at the level of individuals.

More specifically, I think holists cannot deny a global supervenience claim insofar as this claim is understood as being about *ontological* supervenience, not about *ascriptive* supervenience. Indeed, if SUPERVENIENCE was a claim about ascriptive supervenience, then holists could deny it, as the shapelessness of the normative with respect to the non-normative, when applied to normative terms and concepts, may support rejecting a global ascriptive supervenience claim. As Roberts claims (2011, 515–16):

Global ascriptive supervenience holds that we cannot make different evaluative judgments about two worlds without making different nonevaluative judgments about these worlds, and that two worlds that we judge to be nonevaluatively identical we must judge to be evaluatively identical. This requires not merely that there is a nonevaluative subvening base but that we are able to give a complete characterization of it in nonevaluative terms, that is, a characterization that is sufficient to “fix” the evaluative.

However, if our normative concepts are shapeless with respect to the non-normative, then we will not be able to give a complete non-normative description of our normative concepts. This leaves the possibility of rejecting global ascriptive supervenience open. However, the problem of supervenience is not about ascriptive supervenience, but about ontological supervenience, and holists cannot say the same thing about global ontological supervenience as they say about global ascriptive supervenience.

To explain why, it might be useful to recall SUPERVENIENCE:

SUPERVENIENCE: No metaphysically possible world that is identical to a second world in all base respects can be different from the second world in its normative respects.

First, holism is consistent with SUPERVENIENCE, as this claim does not imply that normative properties must also vary with specific non-normative properties, something that would be implied by a strong individual supervenience claim and that is inconsistent with holism. Second, shapelessness is also consistent with SUPERVENIENCE, as it is not the case that this claim implies that there is a real pattern in the non-normative properties upon which the normative properties supervene. All it says is that two metaphysically possible worlds that are non-normatively identical must be normatively identical. As Roberts admits about shapelessness (and a similar thing can be said about holism) (2011, 515):

More specifically, [shapelessness] is compatible with global [ontological] supervenience, for shapelessness does not require the possibility of two worlds differing evaluatively without differing nonevaluatively. Shapelessness is not compatible with local [ontological] supervenience, however. At least, it is not compatible with it unless we understand the local supervenience base to be the entire world.¹⁸³ Typically, however, local [ontological] supervenience doctrines work with a conception of a restricted supervenience base.

Hence, the holist strategy, despite its merits, falls short of responding to the problem of supervenience. The reason why this is so is that, although holism implies that the non-normative property that makes action *A* wrong may not make action *B* wrong, it has nothing to say against the fact that if a world is non-normatively identical to another, then it must be normatively identical. Besides, holism and shapelessness are fully consistent with a global supervenience claim about the normative. Therefore, the holist strategy does not go far enough to deny SUPERVENIENCE, and is hence still committed to a necessary metaphysical relation between the normative and the non-normative.

¹⁸³ This is why Dancy says that the only way for a strong individual claim to be true is by being trivial.

4.2. The “Weak Is Better” Strategy

According to the second strategy, the “weak is better” strategy, the solution to the problem of supervenience is to deny that there is a strong and necessary metaphysical connection between the normative and the non-normative. This strategy has not received a lot of support in the literature, but Alison Hills has published an interesting paper, “Supervenience and Moral Realism”, defending this strategy (2009). According to Hills, non-naturalists should deny the strong modal claim that is SUPERVENIENCE, and maintain something weaker – what Hills calls a “constant conjunction” relation between the normative and the non-normative. As I shall show in this section, this strategy can be understood in two distinct ways. According to the first understanding, the response to the problem of supervenience consists in replacing a strong supervenience claim (either global or individual) by a weak supervenience claim. According to the second understanding, the response to the problem consists in introducing something even weaker than a weak supervenience claim.

4.2.1. *Constant Conjunction*

Hills believes that non-naturalists should deny SUPERVENIENCE, and hence deny that there is a strong necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative, to replace it by a much weaker claim, CONSTANT CONJUNCTION (2009, 167):¹⁸⁴

CONSTANT CONJUNCTION: In the actual world, there are no differences in normative properties without differences in non-normative properties.

What Hills maintains is that, at least in this world, every change at the level of the normative is constantly conjoined with a change at the level of the non-normative. However, as Hills states,

¹⁸⁴ Hills talks about moral and natural properties; for the sake of consistency, I will replace in the definitions and quotes “moral” by “normative”, and “natural” by “non-normative”.

“there is no implication that this is so necessarily, or that it must be so in every possible world” (2009, 168). As I will show in a moment, this last quote could be understood in two ways, as the two sides of the disjunction are not perfectly equivalent. Indeed, the left side may imply something weaker than the right side, and this is why I think this strategy can have two distinct understandings. Before turning to this, and as Hills points out, it is important to note that CONSTANT CONJUNCTION may be a trivial truth, as it is very likely that no two distinct actions can have all the same non-normative properties. This is so because these non-normative properties could range over intrinsic and extrinsic properties of actions. This is why we should rather maintain the following revised version of CONSTANT CONJUNCTION (2009, 168):¹⁸⁵

CONSTANT CONJUNCTION (REVISED): In the actual world, there are no differences in normative properties without differences in some (interesting subset of the) non-normative properties.

This subset could be composed of non-normative properties about, for instance, welfare and happiness; but it is not important for now to decide which non-normative properties are members of this interesting subset. All it is important to stress is that, by maintaining the revised version of CONSTANT CONJUNCTION, we also maintain that non-normative properties outside this set are not normatively relevant and that they are not the non-normative properties with which the normative properties constantly conjoin.

If a claim such as CONSTANT CONJUNCTION is true, then it is easy to see why the problem of supervenience fails. As CONSTANT CONJUNCTION does not entail any kind of strong necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative, non-naturalists do not have to explain such connections anymore. As Hills explains (2009, 169):

¹⁸⁵ From now on, when I will talk about CONSTANT CONJUNCTION, I will always (unless specified otherwise) refer to the revised version of that claim.

We see that the [normative] and the [non-normative] are constantly conjoined, so that we come to expect to see a difference in the interesting [non-normative] properties when we see a [normative] difference. It is the feeling of expectation that explains our belief that there is a necessary connection between the two. In fact, there may be no necessary connection at all.

In the next subsection, I will introduce Hills' argument for the claim that there may be no necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative, that is to say that we can conceive of a normative difference without a non-normative difference.

4.2.2. The Conceivability Argument

For Hills, it is possible to conceive of a world perfectly identical to ours in its non-normative features but normatively different; there is no difficulty here, she says, in imaging such a scenario. However, many would say that this is not possible. According to these people, it would be – among other reasons – the impossibility of conceiving of a world non-normatively identical but normatively different from ours that supports a strong understanding of the supervenience relation. But, Hills is saying, this resistance can be explained in other terms, and hence may not provide support to a strong supervenience claim after all. One way to explain this resistance is normative: we do not want to entertain the possibility that what Hitler did could have been morally permissible, because entertaining that possibility would denote an insufficiently resolute rejection of Hitler's actions. Hence, we resist such a scenario because we consider there is something wrong with engaging in the thought process of believing that what Hitler did could have been morally permissible. For Hills, this can be explained by the fact that the moral change we are asked to consider is importantly "mistaken" compared to what is actually true in our world, and the more mistaken this change is, the more we will show resistance in imaging such a scenario as being true (2009, 173).

However, we could also imagine a different scenario, easier to conceive and entertain: we can entertain the possibility of two worlds, one where a benevolent lie is morally right (i.e. utilitarianism is true in that world), and the other where the same benevolent lie is morally wrong (i.e. deontology is true in that world). According to Hills, there is nothing shocking about imaging such a world, since we are not asked to imagine a world that is completely vicious or bad. The reason why there is nothing shocking may be because benevolent lies are not considered as important, and we may still rightfully resist imaging more radical scenarios. Nevertheless, according to Hills, the possibility of conceiving of this possibility supports the claim that SUPERVENIENCE is false, as we can easily conceive of a situation where there is no strong necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative. It also supports the fact that CONSTANT CONJUNCTION might be a better claim to maintain than SUPERVENIENCE, as the former might better correspond to some of our intuitions about normativity.

4.2.3. *Weak Supervenience*

One way to understand CONSTANT CONJUNCTION is as a weak supervenience claim:¹⁸⁶

WEAK SUPERVENIENCE: $N (\forall F \text{ in } \alpha) (\forall x) (Fx \supset (\exists G \text{ in } \beta) [Gx \ \& \ (\forall y) (Gy \supset Fy)])$

WEAK SUPERVENIENCE must be read as the following claim: it is necessarily the case, if anything x has a normative property F , then there is at least one non-normative property such that x has G , and everything that has G has F . It is possible to understand CONSTANT CONJUNCTION as a commitment to WEAK SUPERVENIENCE, because it is not clear that CONSTANT CONJUNCTION goes against all forms of necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative.

¹⁸⁶ Hills understands the weak supervenience relation as being the following relation: it is metaphysically impossible for there to be a difference in normative properties (within one possible world) without a difference in non-normative properties (2009, 165). However, this understanding of weak supervenience is unclear, as it is not directly about an individual supervenience relation, nor is it about the interesting subset of non-normative properties.

One thing that is sure is that CONSTANT CONJUNCTION is inconsistent with a strong individual supervenience claim, and that it is neutral regarding a global supervenience claim (CONSTANT CONJUNCTION suggests that such a claim is false, but it does not entail that it is false). However, CONSTANT CONJUNCTION is consistent with WEAK SUPERVENIENCE as it might be necessarily the case that in our world, everything G is F. It will still be a contingent truth that, for instance, failing to maximize happiness is morally wrong, as WEAK SUPERVENIENCE only establishes a connection between the normative and the non-normative *in that world*. It is then possible, in another world, that something fails to maximize happiness without being wrong.

However, there are a few issues with uniquely maintaining a WEAK SUPERVENIENCE claim about the normative, and hence denying both a strong individual supervenience claim and a global supervenience claim.¹⁸⁷ First, it is important to note that maintaining WEAK SUPERVENIENCE does not seem to represent an important advantage for non-naturalists. They will still owe us an explanation of why it is the case that there is a necessary connection between G and F that is holding in our world, while potentially failing to hold in another.¹⁸⁸ Importantly, they will have to do this without committing themselves to SUPERVENIENCE, something easier said than done.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, they will have to do this while respecting non-naturalists' commitment to *sui generis* normative properties.

¹⁸⁷ This strategy will need to deny these two claims in order to deny SUPERVENIENCE. As I said in the previous paragraph, CONSTANT CONJUNCTION suggest that global supervenience is false without directly implying it. Hence, there is most likely a logical gap in this strategy, and it may then not go far enough to deny SUPERVENIENCE. This could also be a reason to reject this strategy, but I also consider that there are other very important issues with it.

¹⁸⁸ This connection between G and F is necessary because, even with WEAK SUPERVENIENCE, this connection holds by necessity in our world, meaning that it cannot be otherwise in our world. Hence, it is not an accident that, in our world, G is necessarily connected with F. This will be also be discussed further in section 4.3.2.

¹⁸⁹ Also, someone could say that, if non-naturalists decide to maintain WEAK SUPERVENIENCE rather than SUPERVENIENCE, then they are still facing Blackburn's version of the problem of supervenience and will have to explain why mixed worlds are banned. This is probably right, but as I think non-naturalists can reject Blackburn's version of the problem of supervenience without committing themselves to a strong supervenience claim (see section 2.3.2.1), I do not think this is the best reason to be suspicious of this understanding of the "weaker is better" strategy to respond to (McPherson's version of) the problem of supervenience.

Another important issue with WEAK SUPERVENIENCE is that it seems rather useless, as this claim has no counterfactual implication beyond our world. Because of this very feature, it is not possible to imply anything that will hold across possible worlds with WEAK SUPERVENIENCE, and, as Majors argues, this makes such supervenience claims “useless as theoretical tools” (2009, 41).¹⁹⁰ Not only will they be useless, but they will also fail to account for an intrinsic feature of normative thinking: relying on counterfactual implications and possible situations.

More specifically, the reason why WEAK SUPERVENIENCE is useless is that although we can know that there is a necessary connection between G and F in w_1 , we know nothing about the connection between G and F in w_2 . And we may wonder what is the point of knowing this about G and F in w_1 , if it cannot even support interworld counterfactual claims. It cannot support such claims as, specifically, we do not know the connection between G and F in w_2 , or in any other world. To contrast this point with another, we would know that if w_1 and w_2 are naturally identical, and if there is a necessary connection between the natural properties G_1 and G_2 in w_1 , then this relation also holds in w_2 . We would know this as we may also believe that for two worlds to be naturally identical, the same laws of nature must be true in these worlds, and that it is in virtue of a specific law of nature that there is a necessary connection between G_1 and G_2 .¹⁹¹ However, and very importantly, trying to maintain such a thing is not even available to us with WEAK SUPERVENIENCE. With WEAK SUPERVENIENCE, we may know that everything G is F in w_1 , but we cannot infer anything about the relation between G and F in w_2 , even if w_1 and w_2 are naturally identical worlds.¹⁹² This is the main reason why WEAK SUPERVENIENCE does not

¹⁹⁰ In a footnote, Majors adds the following: “Weak supervenience theses – *pace* Davidson, Blackburn, and Hare – are of no interest to anyone, certainly not the moral realist” (2009, 47, n. 14).

¹⁹¹ In order to maintain this, we would most likely already need something modally stronger than WEAK SUPERVENIENCE.

¹⁹² Maybe this issue would not arise for realists are realists, but for non-naturalists this would be a real problem.

appear to be a very useful theoretical tool, at least for non-naturalist realists. Even if this point is not a conclusive reason to reject a weak supervenience claim about the normative, there is little interest in maintaining a claim that is not very useful and that cannot support interworld counterfactuals (I will have more to say on this last point in the next section). Thus, I think it is fair to say that this strategy to deny SUPERVENIENCE is neither conclusive nor convincing.

4.2.4. Weaker than Weak Supervenience

The second understanding of CONSTANT CONJUNCTION is as being even a weaker claim than WEAK SUPERVENIENCE. This reading is supported by the fact that Hills says that the constant conjunction between the normative and the non-normative properties true of our world does not imply that it is necessary. However, WEAK SUPERVENIENCE still implies that a connection between a normative and a non-normative property is necessarily true, although only necessarily in that world. This connection is necessary because it cannot be otherwise, although with WEAK SUPERVENIENCE this “cannot be otherwise” only holds in our world; it has no implication about other metaphysically possible worlds. Hence, saying that CONSTANT CONJUNCTION does not imply any necessary connection may suggest that it is not consistent with WEAK SUPERVENIENCE. This reading of CONSTANT CONJUNCTION is also supported by what Hills says while discussing that we can conceive of two situations non-normatively identical but normatively different (2009, 174):

So far we have set out a thought experiment against Strong Supervenience – the claim that if N1 underlies M1, it does so in every possible world – not Weak Supervenience – the claim that if N1 underlies M1 in one possible world, it always does so in that world. Consider a possible world in which there are two benevolent lies. Can we suppose for the sake of argument that first utilitarianism is true and the first lie is morally acceptable, then that there is a change in distribution of the [normative] properties so that Kant’s moral theory is true and the second lie is morally wrong? Can we imagine that this is true? I think that, with the background of non-naturalism, this is imaginable. If this is right, then this is a reason to think that the conceivability argument does not support weak supervenience either.

What this means is that it is possible, under this understanding of CONSTANT CONJUNCTION, for two actions to be non-normatively identical without being normatively identical, and so in the same world (these actions, obviously, will need to be numerically distinct). This is the reason why this reading of CONSTANT CONJUNCTION is weaker than WEAK SUPERVENIENCE.

This understanding of CONSTANT CONJUNCTION, although I think it should be rejected, would have the advantage of not being committed to an unexplainable necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative. It would then have an advantage over WEAK SUPERVENIENCE, as it would not have to explain why it is the case the everything G, in our world, must also be F.

Hills discusses two problems with this understanding of CONSTANT CONJUNCTION, and I think they are exactly the reasons why we should reject this strategy to respond to the problem of supervenience. The first problem concerns the fact that the defenders of CONSTANT CONJUNCTION would still have to explain why it is the case that there is a constant conjunction between normative and non-normative properties in our world. According to Hills, as this relation is weak, it is not necessary to explain it. Here is what she says about this issue (2009, 175–76):

Do we need an explanation for why there happens to be no change in [normative] properties without a change in those [non-normative] properties in this world? I do not think that a mere regularity, with no implications that the connection is necessary, does require an explanation. It is simply a brute fact, admittedly one that makes a certain kind of [normative] reasoning and [normative] argument possible. But a brute fact that does not require explanation nonetheless.¹⁹³

I think Hills is too charitable with her proposal. If we understand her idea of a constant conjunction between the normative and the non-normative as being distinct from WEAK

¹⁹³ Here, I think we can dispute Hills' understanding of what a brute fact is, as a brute fact is not something that does not *require* an explanation, it is rather something that does not or cannot be explained. Putting things in terms of "requiring" an explanation is misleading, as nothing necessarily requires an explanation. Whether we think that something requires an explanation is rather dependent on our interests, among other things.

SUPERVENIENCE, then it is not the case that what she introduces is a mere regularity that does not require an explanation. Indeed, since she believes that the conceivability argument does not even support WEAK SUPERVENIENCE, it is conceivable or possible for two actions to share all the same set of interesting non-normative properties without being normatively identical, and for reasons that may very well be completely obscure to us. This is so because, since these two objects would share the same set of interesting non-normative properties, we will not be able to point to a normatively relevant non-normative property to explain the change at the normative level. If we can explain this difference at the normative level by pointing to a non-normative property that we thought was not a member of this interesting set of non-normative properties, then we would have to conclude that we were wrong and that this non-normative property was a member of the interesting set. If, for whatever reason, it is the case that two actions that share the same set of interesting non-normative properties must share the same normative properties, then this proposal is reducible to WEAK SUPERVENIENCE. And, if this proposal is reducible to WEAK SUPERVENIENCE, then it is not the case that all that CONSTANT CONJUNCTION implies is a mere regularity.¹⁹⁴ So, even if Hills believes that she is off the hook by maintaining CONSTANT CONJUNCTION, it is far from being the case: she still owes us an explanation of how two actions that are non-normatively identical could be normatively different.¹⁹⁵

The second issue is epistemological in nature, and has to do with the fact that, if CONSTANT CONJUNCTION is true, we may not be able to discover normative truths by using thought experiments and by thinking about possible and counterfactual cases. Here is Hills' response to this (2009, 176):

¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, if we agree on something weaker than WEAK SUPERVENIENCE, then it seems like we are just not able to explain how it is the case that normative facts are ultimately explained by non-normative facts, as two situations non-normatively identical may be normatively different.

¹⁹⁵ I will further discuss a similar point when discussing the "strong contingency strategy".

According to constant conjunction accounts, when you are reflecting on [normative] problems or considering thought experiments, you are making use of a regularity that exists in this world between [normative] and [non-normative] properties. This regularity you may first discover through experience or through the testimony of others. Then you can use your knowledge in thought experiments to consider possible situations that you have not met – just as an experienced engineer might be able to use reflection or a thought experiment to tell you whether a bridge would stand up if it were built.

Once again, I think Hills is too charitable with her proposal. Indeed, this could be a good reply if CONSTANT CONJUNCTION and the conceivability argument were supporting a weak supervenience claim. However, if this is not the case, and if it is possible for two actions to be non-normatively identical without being normatively identical, then an appeal to our experience is weak and always subject to being overridden. CONSTANT CONJUNCTION being at best committed to a mere regularity, we would always have to admit that our experience of this mere regularity may not be reliable, and that our experience is at best a hint of how the future may look like. Indeed, as all we grasp is a mere regularity, and as nothing suggests that this regularity between the normative and the non-normative holds necessarily (even only in our world), it is not clear that this can be rightly used to predict the future or used in thought experiments. Hills could still say that our experience can be used to predict what may happen, but thought experiments in normativity (and more specifically in ethics) are seeking something stronger than a probable outcome. Indeed, it seems like we use thought experiments to evaluate whether what we believe is true, not only whether what we believe is probable. Hence, with thought experiments, we are seeking to discover something stronger than a mere regularity that sometimes holds, sometimes fails to hold. This does not mean that we cannot know normative truths by grasping a mere regularity, but rather that our knowledge of this regularity might not be very useful after all. Thus, considering these two reasons, I think it is safer to conclude that this strategy to deny SUPERVENIENCE cannot be successful.

4.3. The Strong Contingency Strategy

According to the third strategy, the “strong contingency” strategy, it is possible to deny SUPERVENIENCE and replace it by another claim, NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE:

NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE: Necessarily, if two normatively possible situations are alike in every non-normative respect, they are alike in every normative respect.

This claim would have the advantage of neither coming with the issues related to SUPERVENIENCE, nor coming with the issues related to WEAK SUPERVENIENCE. The reason why this would be so is that, according to contingentists such as Gideon Rosen and Anandi Hattiangadi,¹⁹⁶ pure normative facts or basic normative facts are necessary, and hence true in some metaphysically possible worlds, although this form of necessity is distinct from the strong form of necessity – metaphysical necessity – that is assumed in the problem of supervenience. In order to ease the introduction of this strategy, I will use Scanlon’s view of the relations between pure normative facts, mixed normative facts, and non-normative facts. Also, the strong contingency strategy may also be what Scanlon intended to maintain. Nothing essential to my assessment of the strong contingency strategy relies on Scanlon’s view, and I think this strategy should be denied for reasons that are beyond the truthfulness of Scanlon’s *Reasons Fundamentalism*. Furthermore, this strategy, I believe, represents the most interesting way to deny SUPERVENIENCE, and, as I think it should be rejected (for reasons to be explained later), we should conclude that non-naturalists cannot deny SUPERVENIENCE.

¹⁹⁶ Hattiangadi refers to this strategy as “primitivism” (2018, 606).

4.3.1. *Reasons Fundamentalism and SUPERVENIENCE*

As explained in section 3.6.2, one possibility to understand Scanlon's *Reasons Fundamentalism*, and more specifically what he says in the second lecture of *Being Realistic about Reasons*, is as introducing a direct reply to the problem of supervenience. This direct reply, I recall, would consist in denying BRUTE CONNECTION by explaining the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties. However, as I explained in section 3.6.2.3, this reply is not satisfying. There is nevertheless a different reading of Scanlon's view, a reading put forward timidly by Scanlon, but put together systematically by Gideon Rosen in his paper "Scanlon's Modal Metaphysics" (2017c). Rosen argues that understanding Scanlon as trying to explain SUPERVENIENCE is misleading, that it is better to understand him as trying to reject SUPERVENIENCE. Two reasons suggest that Rosen is right here: (i) there are some passages in Scanlon's book that suggest that he denies SUPERVENIENCE; (ii) it is not clear that maintaining that pure normative facts are true in all possible worlds (something essential to assume if these facts are to explain how mixed normative facts metaphysically necessarily vary with non-normative facts) is consistent with Scanlon's *Reasons Fundamentalism*. Let me explain these two points in order.

In the last chapter, I was taking for granted that Scanlon was trying to reject BRUTE CONNECTION, and hence was in favor of maintaining SUPERVENIENCE. This assumption was justified by taking seriously Scanlon's idea that pure normative facts do not vary, something that seems best explained by assuming that these facts are metaphysically necessary. If so, then Scanlon would still maintain SUPERVENIENCE. However, it is not clear that this is really what Scanlon is trying to do, as some passages of *Being Realistic about Reasons* suggest that he maintains something weaker than metaphysical necessity. As Scanlon says (2014, 41):

The truth of pure normative claims, by contrast, does not depend on, or co-vary with, non-normative facts. Nor do pure normative facts vary ‘on their own.’ Given that they do not, the mixed normative facts that depend on them supervene on non-normative facts. This again is a normative matter, a case of normative necessity.

And then, he adds in a footnote related to this quote: “I believe the necessity of pure normative facts is an instance of normative necessity of the kind [Kit Fine] has in mind” (2014, 41). This may sound surprising, considering Fine seems to maintain that basic normative truths are contingent, in the sense that they would not be metaphysically necessary (more on this in a moment), but the best reading of Scanlon’s text might be that he in fact tries to deny SUPERVENIENCE, rather than BRUTE CONNECTION.¹⁹⁷

According to Rosen, beyond the fact that Scanlon may himself support something like normative necessity (and hence reject SUPERVENIENCE), there is a good reason to believe that maintaining that pure normative facts are metaphysically necessary is inconsistent with Scanlon’s *Reasons Fundamentalism*. Following Fine (1994b), we may say that for a truth to be metaphysically necessary, this truth must be implied by the nature or essence of things.¹⁹⁸ For instance, we may say that it is metaphysically necessary that water is a compound because it lies in the nature of water to be H₂O, which then implies that it lies in the nature of water to be a compound. Or, (assuming it is a fact) the fact that it is metaphysically necessary that, if *S* knows *p*, then *p* is true, could be explained by the fact that it lies in the nature of knowledge that whatever is known is true (Rosen 2017c, 861).

However, this view about metaphysical necessity is inconsistent with one of Scanlon’s core commitments: that there is nothing more that could be said about the property of being a reason (the most fundamental normative notion), except that it is a four-place relation. What this means

¹⁹⁷ What he was really trying to argue for in *Being Realistic about Reasons*, and whether he was trying to explain SUPERVENIENCE or just explain how some of our reasons vary with non-normative facts, may not be clear for Scanlon himself (Scanlon 2017, 894–95).

¹⁹⁸ I am following Rosen here and will only focus on Fine’s view of metaphysical necessity.

is that the notion of being a reason cannot be further analyzed than by saying that it is a consideration in favor of someone's doing something in her circumstances, which is precisely what it is for something to be a reason. Because there is nothing more, according to Scanlon, to the property of being a consideration in favor of doing something than it is a reason for doing something (a four-place relation), we cannot appeal to the essence of the property of being a reason to explain why something is a reason. In other words, that means that reasons have no hidden nature, if *Reasons Fundamentalism* is true. Importantly, denying that reasons have no hidden nature would represent, for Scanlon, denying one of the core commitments of his view. It is then unlikely that Scanlon would be ready to drop the idea that reasons have no hidden nature, while this would be necessary to argue that pure normative facts are metaphysically necessary – insofar as we follow Fine's view of metaphysical necessity (Rosen 2017c, 867).¹⁹⁹

This is what, according to Rosen, justifies exploring other possibilities than arguing that pure normative facts are metaphysically necessary. Importantly, what will be discussed in the following paragraphs holds beyond the framework of Scanlon's view; but, for reasons of simplicity, I will importantly follow what Rosen is introducing in "Scanlon's Modal Metaphysics" about the possibility of maintaining that pure normative facts are normatively necessary and denying SUPERVENIENCE. What will be said will then depend also on the context of Scanlon's view, but I recall that what will be argued against the strong contingency strategy

¹⁹⁹ The point here is not that appealing to a hidden nature of reasons is something impossible, just that it is not something Scanlon wants to do for the notion of *reasons*. Reductionists could say that reasons have a hidden nature, which will be revealed by the result of the reduction. For instance, if reasons are reducible to desires, then the hidden nature of reasons will be understood in terms of desires. Obviously, due to his non-reductionism, Scanlon cannot appeal to something like this. However, non-reductionism does not stop some non-naturalists from arguing that normative properties have a hidden nature. A non-naturalist could explain how it is the case that "pain is bad" is necessarily true – assuming it is – by appealing to some essential features of the property of being bad that, together with some essential features of the property of being painful, explain why it is the case that it is necessarily the case that "pain is bad" (Wedgwood 2007). To do so, it is necessary to assume that *badness* (and *painfulness*) has a hidden nature. Interestingly, Scanlon can do it for other thicker normative notions, such as moral wrongness. For Scanlon, *wrongness* has a hidden nature, that can be defined in terms of *reasons* (2014, 44).

does hold beyond its application to Scanlon's *Reasons Fundamentalism*, as the reasons to reject this strategy do not depend on the details of Scanlon's view.

4.3.2. *Pure Normative Facts and Normative Necessity*

According to Fine, normative necessity is a distinct kind of necessity from metaphysical and natural necessity (2002). Metaphysical necessity has been briefly discussed in the preceding section, and I do not think it is necessary to say more about this form of necessity than that, for Fine, it follows from the nature or essence of things. Normative necessity and natural necessity, however, share some similarities. Unlike normative necessity, natural necessity concerns the necessity of laws of nature, but like normative necessity, it is weaker than metaphysical necessity. If p is naturally necessary, then p is true in some (metaphysically) possible worlds but not in all of them.²⁰⁰ Hence, for Fine, as normative necessity is like natural necessity, if p is normatively necessary, then p is true in some (metaphysically) possible worlds, but p will also be false in some (metaphysically) possible worlds. That means that pure normative facts, if normatively necessary, are not necessarily true in all (metaphysically) possible worlds. That also means that, at least in some sense of "contingent", pure normative facts of a given world are "contingent". Importantly, this does not mean that these pure normative facts of a given world are mere accidents: they are necessarily true *in that world*, and – as we will see in a moment – in all normatively possible worlds relative to it.

²⁰⁰ Some people will disagree here, and rather maintain that natural necessity is of the same modal force as metaphysical necessity. It is not necessary, for the purpose of my discussion, to go into the details of this debate. For the moment, I will simply assume pluralism about necessity, as it is necessary to do so to assess this idea that there is a *sui generis* sense of necessity for normativity.

Here is how Rosen defines what it means for a normative proposition to be normatively necessary (2017d, 144):

p is normatively necessary if and only if for any non-normative proposition *q*, if *q* had been the case *p* would still have been the case.

Importantly, for a proposition to be normatively necessary it has to be “non-normative fact independent”: it cannot be falsified by a non-normative fact. Here are two quotes from Rosen to further explain what this means (Rosen 2017d, 144, 2017c, 867):

A normative proposition that [is normatively necessary] is true and would still have been true no matter how hard we had tried to falsify it, no matter what our preferences or practices or sensibilities had been, no matter how the natural history of the universe had unfolded, and so on. This modal resilience gives a sense in which these normative truths simply had to be as they are, even if there are remote possible worlds – countermoral worlds – where things are otherwise.

For *p* to be normatively necessary, on my account, just is for *p* to be a true proposition that would still have been true no matter how the non-normative facts had been. Truths that have this status are modally resilient in the following sense: they would still have been true no matter how hard we had tried to falsify them, no matter what we had done or thought, no matter how the contingent history of the natural world had unfolded, and so on. This modal resilience, I claim, amounts to a perfectly good species of necessity.

That pure normative facts would still have been true no matter how the non-normative facts had been follows from the definition given by Scanlon of these facts: pure normative facts do not depend on nor vary with non-normative facts. Saying otherwise would deny what makes pure normative facts *pure*. Hence, because the normatively necessary facts are not contingent on non-normative facts, there are no true claims of the form “if the non-normative facts had been different, the pure normative truths would have been different” (Rosen 2017c, 867). This is, according to Rosen, an essential feature that a fact must have in order to be normatively necessary. However, pure normative facts will be true *only* in the worlds that are normatively possible relative to a given world: w_2 is normatively possible relative to w_1 if and only if every proposition that is normatively necessary at w_1 holds at w_2 . If this is not the case, then w_1 and w_2 are not normatively possible relative to each other, although w_1 and w_2 could be both

metaphysically possible. Hence, pure normative claims true at w_1 may be false in other worlds that are not normatively possible relative to it.

This is specifically what makes pure normative facts metaphysically contingent. Since normative necessity is weaker than metaphysical necessity, pure normative facts may be false in some “countermoral” worlds. Countermoral worlds are metaphysically possible worlds where the pure normative truths are different (I think we need to understand “counter” here in its weak sense: as “in opposition with” rather than as “in the opposite direction”; w_2 will be “in opposition with” w_1 insofar as one fact normatively necessary in w_1 is not normatively necessary in w_2). This concludes my explanation of the view according to which pure normative are normatively necessary.

4.3.3. Normative Supervenience

If we assume that pure normative facts are metaphysically necessary, as we were doing in section 3.6.2.2, then it would be the case that two situations non-normatively identical will be normatively identical. This is so because mixed normative facts are made true by non-normative facts and pure normative facts; if these pure normative facts are metaphysically necessary, then they never vary; and if they never vary, then two situations non-normatively identical will necessarily be normatively identical. However, if we deny that pure normative facts are metaphysically necessary, as Rosen proposes, then a new possibility is now available. It is in this context that Rosen introduces NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE, as a replacement of SUPERVENIENCE (2017c, 868)²⁰¹:

²⁰¹ Rosen understands the supervenience relation between the normative and the non-normative as holding between individuals, not between entire worlds. Also, here is how he understands what he calls “metaphysical supervenience”, claim that I take to be roughly equivalent, in its modal force, to SUPERVENIENCE: “If two

NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE: Necessarily, if two normatively possible situations are alike in every non-normative respect, they are alike in every normative respect.

Two situations are normatively possible relative to each other when they are governed by the same normative laws, or by the same pure normative principles. Equivalently, two situations are normatively possible relative to each other either when they are in the same possible world or when they are in worlds normatively possible relative to each other. NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE is hence weaker than SUPERVENIENCE, and consists in a denial of SUPERVENIENCE, as it does not imply that every two non-normatively indistinguishable situations are normatively indistinguishable, and as it does not suggest nor imply that if two worlds are non-normatively identical, then they must be normatively identical.

Here are two quotes from Rosen that summarize and highlight some important consequences of NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE (2017c, 860 and 866):

[I]f the pure principle is a mere *contingent* truth, there will be cases in which Jones and Smith are alike in every non-normative respect but Jones inhabits a world where the principle is true while Smith inhabits a world in which it is false (and where Smith himself is a counterexample to it). So if the pure normative principle is contingent there will be cases in which Jones and Smith are alike in non-normative respects but different in some normative respect, so supervenience will fail.

[T]here may be possible worlds that resemble ours in every non-normative respect in which the fact that you are in pain gives me no reason to help you out. According to Fine, pure normative principles are normatively necessary but metaphysically contingent. On a view of this sort, the supervenience problem as traditionally conceived does not arise. The traditional problem is to explain why the normative facts do not ‘vary on their own,’ or in other words, to explain why, if the normative facts are distinct from the natural facts, the latter should fix the former as a matter of absolute necessity. If metaphysical supervenience is false, as Fine maintains, the explanandum evaporates and the problem disappears.

These two quotes make it clear that maintaining NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE implies denying SUPERVENIENCE: if the former is true, then it cannot be the case anymore that all worlds non-normatively identical are also normatively identical. If the former is true, it also means that some

metaphysically possible things are alike in every non-normative respect, they are alike in every normative respect” (Rosen 2017c, 860).

worlds non-normatively identical to – let us say – our world will be normatively different. They will be normatively different because there will be different pure normative facts in that world, facts that will make true different mixed normative claims than in our world (if they make true some mixed normative claims in that world).

Maintaining NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE, if it can be done successfully, will solve the problem of supervenience, as it would not be the case anymore that non-naturalists are committed to a metaphysically necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative. This connection will rather be contingent, or, more specifically, *normatively necessary*. And if NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE can handle the main objections against it, then non-naturalism could be more plausible than it was before, as one of the main metaphysical problems against it would have completely disappeared. As Rosen explains (2017c, 868; emphasis in the original):

Normative Supervenience is clearly much weaker than the metaphysical supervenience thesis that metaethicists have found self-evident. The chief metaphysical difficulty for non-naturalism has always been to explain *that* thesis. The present proposal, which I offer Scanlon in a spirit of non-naturalist solidarity, is to concede that this cannot be done and to embrace Normative Supervenience as a replacement thesis.

There remains one important question: is it the case that NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE can handle the main objections against it? In section 4.3.5, I will show that this is unlikely; before, I will discuss the argument to believe in NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE introduced by Anandi Hattiangadi in “Moral Supervenience” (2018), an argument similar to the conceivability argument introduced by Hills (2009) discussed in section 4.2.2.

4.3.4. From Ideal Conceivability to Metaphysical Possibility

We may still wonder, even if we believe that Rosen’s proposition to understand pure normative facts as normatively necessary is interesting, why we should believe such a proposition. Indeed,

Rosen is clear in arguing that Scanlon should maintain that pure normative facts are normatively necessary, but it is not clear that he introduces a *positive* reason to maintain NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE. According to Hattiangadi, we do have a positive reason to maintain NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE as we can imagine, even under ideal conditions, a world with different pure normative facts. In other words, a world with different pure normative facts is “ideally conceivable”, and from this Hattiangadi believes that we can derive the metaphysical possibility of such a world.

The details of her argument are a little bit complex, but here is my take on it. According to Hattiangadi, it is possible to imagine a sentence N that would constitute a complete non-normative description of all the facts of the world w_1 (2018, 593). To N , we can add a statement T of the kind “that is all”, such that nothing more is needed to satisfy N . The point of NT is to provide a complete description of a world, in this case w_1 . To NT , we can add the indexical marker I identifying that center of w_1 (as far as my understanding goes, I is needed to cover the possibility of some agent-relative normative truths (2018, 610)). We now have the sentence, if we can call that a sentence, NTI . Now, let us assume that M , an arbitrary normative truth such as “pain is bad”, is true at w_1 . At w_1 , $(NTI \& M)$ is then true. Hattiangadi’s point is to argue that, given non-naturalists’ commitment to *sui generis* properties, there is no *a priori* entailment between NTI and M . Hence, $(NTI \& \sim M)$ is ideally conceivable, and because it is ideally conceivable, it is also metaphysically possible. Let me unpack this argument a little bit.

According to Hattiangadi, non-naturalists can maintain that there is no *a priori* entailment between NTI and any particular normative truth because all the possibilities to argue for such an entailment are inconsistent with non-naturalism. As non-naturalists believe that normative concepts cannot be understood in terms of non-normative or natural concepts, a conceptual

entailment from *NTI* to *M* is not possible; as non-naturalists believe that normative facts are not metaphysically continuous with non-normative or natural facts, then it is unlikely that *NTI* can exhaustively constitute *M*; and so on.²⁰² From this, Hattiangadi concludes that (*NTI*&~*M*) is ideally conceivable, as she had previously defined what it means for a sentence to be ideally conceivable (2018, 594):

For a sentence *S* to be *prima facie* conceivable is for it to be logically consistent and conceptually coherent, at least on the face of it. For a sentence *S* to be ideally conceivable is for it to remain coherent under ideal rational reflection. If *S* is ideally conceivable, then it is possible for an ideally rational being to maximally fill in the details of a scenario in which *S* is true without detecting any logical inconsistency or incoherence with anything knowable *a priori*.

The reason why (*NTI*&~*M*) is ideally conceivable is because this sentence does not imply any logical inconsistency or incoherence with anything we could know *a priori*. Now, we have, following Hattiangadi, established that (*NTI*&*M*) and (*NTI*&~*M*) are both ideally conceivable (as, if one is ideally conceivable then the other is also). How can we go from ideal conceivability to metaphysical possibility?

If my understanding of Hattiangadi's argument is correct, then the only way, it seems, for non-naturalists to resist inferring the metaphysical possibility of both (*NTI*&*M*) and (*NTI*&~*M*) from their ideal conceivability would be to argue that basic normative or moral principles (or pure normative facts) are metaphysically necessary (2018, 604).²⁰³ However, maintaining that normative principles are metaphysically necessary does directly lead to the problem of supervenience, and, for this very reason, is not an interesting option for non-naturalists. As they

²⁰² The overall argument of the previous chapter, according to which non-naturalists do not have a compelling account of the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties, may support Hattiangadi's claim that there is no *a priori* entailment between *NTI* and *M*.

²⁰³ Hattiangadi also introduces a positive argument for this point, based on the idea of normative concepts as "super-rigid" concepts. A concept is super-rigid if it has the same extension in all metaphysically possible worlds. For Hattiangadi, it is fair to assume that non-naturalists believe that – for instance – 'good' is a super-rigid concept and that it picks the same *sui generis* property in all metaphysically possible worlds. Hattiangadi also argues that the sentence *NT* is super-rigid, but her argument for this is, at best, abstruse (2018, 605–6).

cannot argue that basic normative principles are metaphysically necessary, they must concede that $(NTI \& M)$ and $(NTI \& \sim M)$ are both metaphysically possible.

Before moving on, it is important to discuss how contingentists believe they can account for the intuitions that are presumably supporting a supervenience relation about normativity. The first intuition is that if anyone were exactly like St. Francis in his non-normative respects, then this person would also be a good person. About this intuition, Hattiangadi says that we need to be careful about how we evaluate this counterfactual: we need to evaluate it by looking at the closest possible worlds at which the antecedent is true (2018, 607).²⁰⁴ And, while doing that, we also need to keep the facts of our world true, including the pure normative facts. Hence, in these closest possible worlds, as the pure normative facts of our world are also true, it will be the case that anyone exactly like St. Francis in his non-normative respects would be a good person.

The second intuition is that there can be no normative difference without a non-normative difference. This intuition, according to contingentists, is explained by revisiting its meaning a little bit: rather than saying that the claim that there can be no normative difference without a non-normative difference is a claim about all metaphysically possible worlds, this claim can be regarded as a claim about all *normatively* possible worlds. Hence, this intuition would suggest that it is not possible for w_1 and w_2 to be normatively different without being non-normatively different, insofar as the same pure normative facts are true at w_1 and at w_2 . By consequence, it would be possible to have a normative difference without a non-normative difference, if the pure normative facts true at w_1 were not true at w_2 . About a very similar point, Rosen says the following (2017b, 166):

²⁰⁴ That contingentists can accommodate interworld counterfactuals is an advantage of NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE over WEAK SUPERVENIENCE.

When we are invited to imagine an act that is just like A in all non-normative respects but which is (say) right when A is wrong, we balk. This suggests that *in some sense* there could not possibly be such an act. But when we are explicitly invited to consider a world in which A has the non-normative features it actually has, but in which the *moral laws are different*—e.g., a world in which Act Utilitarianism is true—we may well say, ‘Fine. If things had been like *that*, then A, which is in fact wrong, would have been right, despite the fact that it’s non-normative features would have been no different.’

Hattiangadi is also saying something similar (2018, 612, n. 34):

On the face of it, even if our world is a utilitarian world, we can imagine a world that is just like our world in all natural respects at which deontology is true. The natural facts do not constrain the imagination in such a way as to rule out the truth of deontology. At best, we might hope that we will discover that the natural facts will do so in the long run.

According to contingentists, our intuition according to which there cannot be a normative difference without a non-normative difference is not as strong as it may look, and it may very well accommodate the claim that there could be a normative difference without a non-normative difference if the pure normative facts were different.

This concludes my explanation of the contingentists’ strategy to reject SUPERVENIENCE. I take this strategy to be constituted by what Rosen says about normative necessity, and by Hattiangadi’s positive argument for the claim that pure normative facts are metaphysically contingent.²⁰⁵

4.3.5. *Assessment of the Strong Contingency Strategy*

In this section, I will discuss three reasons to deny NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE and the idea that pure normative facts are normatively necessary. The first reason concerns the fact that, if pure normative facts are normatively necessary, then it seems impossible to explain why in some

²⁰⁵ As I said previously, I have decided to introduce this strategy by focusing on Scanlon’s theory of pure and mixed normative facts to ease its introduction. However, it is important to note again that it could be possible to argue for contingentism even if, for whatever reason, Scanlon’s view about pure and mixed normative facts is wrong. In any case, contingentists will maintain a picture similar to the one Scanlon is maintaining, a picture according to which most normative facts (mixed or particular normative facts) are explained or grounded by some non-normative facts and by another normative fact (a pure normative fact or a bridge principle). For more on this point, see Rosen (2017b, 163–68).

cases they are true while false in others. The second reason concerns the fact that understanding pure normative facts as normatively necessary is inconsistent with the following claim (also a core claim of Scanlon): mixed normative claims (or claims about our reasons) are partly made true by non-normative facts. The third reason concerns the fact that maintaining the pure normative facts are normatively necessary may entail that we cannot know these facts (besides, it is most likely inconsistent with Scanlon's take on how we can get to know these facts).

4.3.5.1. Normative Necessity, Normative Change, and Normative Arbitrariness

Very importantly, following normative necessity and NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE, nothing prevents us from saying that there are worlds where the non-normative facts are identical, but where the pure normative facts are different. Saying otherwise would amount to maintaining SUPERVENIENCE, a claim that Rosen and Hattiangadi (and contingentists in general, I assume) wish to deny. It is hence possible that two worlds non-normatively identical are normatively different, since pure normative facts do not depend on nor vary with non-normative facts. So, non-normative facts could be the same but pure normative facts could be different. This is even something acknowledged by Rosen (and by Fine), as I quoted him in section 4.3.3 (2017c, 866): “there may be possible worlds that resemble ours in every non-normative respect in which the fact that you are in pain gives me no reason to help you out”. Hence, it is possible to imagine two worlds, w_1 and w_2 , non-normatively identical, but with different pure normative facts; these worlds are then not normatively possible relative to each other. Also, considering that pure normative facts participate in making true mixed normative facts, the mixed normative truths will also be different in these two worlds.

While, with normative necessity, it is possible to explain why mixed normative facts will be different in w_1 and w_2 (i.e. different pure normative facts make different mixed normative claims true), I consider that contingentists have no explanation of a further and more troubling question: why is it the case that pure normative facts vary, when they do vary? This question is pressing, since pure normative facts determine which mixed normative facts hold in a world and, by the same token, determine our reasons. Also, it seems like saying something of the kind “basic normative facts of w_1 are not true in w_2 ” is not the kind of explanation that would be acceptable. Indeed, we are looking for something that would justify why pure normative facts true in one world could be false in another. Furthermore, it is important to note that this justification cannot appeal to non-normative or natural facts as pure normative facts are completely independent from these. Doing otherwise may also mean that pure normative facts are not *sui generis* anymore, something that is inconsistent with non-naturalism.

I consider that contingentists’ best option here is to bite the bullet, and agree that change in pure normative facts cannot be explained as pure normative facts are “robustly brute” facts. What I mean by this is that pure normative facts do not depend on anything else than themselves: they do not depend on non-normative facts nor on other normative facts, they are robustly brute. Indeed, if change in pure normative facts can be explained by some other normative facts, then it seems like these normative facts were not pure but mixed, as pure normative facts are supposed to be basic.²⁰⁶ And, if change in pure normative facts can be explained by some non-normative

²⁰⁶ It may be, as Rosen says, that Scanlon does not have to maintain that all pure normative facts are basic (2017c, 859). Nevertheless, Scanlon must maintain that at least some pure normative facts are basic, and it is to these facts that I am referring. Furthermore, assuming for now that some pure normative facts are not basic, if one of these facts changes, it will still need to be explained, and I do not think it can be explained by some non-normative facts as even non-basic pure normative facts would need to be independent from non-normative facts. The only possibility is to explain this change by appealing to a higher-order pure normative fact, and it seems like every change at a lower level would need to be accompanied by a change at a higher level. Hence, at some point, this regression would stop,

facts, then it seems like these normative facts were not pure but mixed, as pure normative facts are not supposed to vary with nor depend on non-normative facts.²⁰⁷ Hence, it is the very features of pure normative facts that prevent us from explaining how they could be contingent, if they are indeed contingent (the same point could be said about basic normative principles). Positing these facts as contingent is one thing, but explaining how they could vary is another. If it is not possible to explain why pure normative facts can vary, then I think we should conclude that these facts are completely arbitrary (Väyrynen 2017, 181–82). However, agreeing to completely arbitrary pure normative facts that will also determine – directly or indirectly – *all* our reasons for action, is a very bad pill to swallow.

Hattiangadi responds to this point by saying that laws of nature are also contingent (this is so if Fine is right in believing that natural necessity is weaker than metaphysical necessity) and that this very feature of these laws does not make them arbitrary. Hence, the fact that laws of normativity, pure normative facts or basic normative principles are contingent should not be enough to make them arbitrary (Hattiangadi 2018, 608). In a sense, Hattiangadi's strategy is to find a companion in guilt to the claim that pure normative facts are contingent, and the laws of nature seem to be the perfect companion. Hence, contingentists might once again bite a bullet, and admit that pure normative facts are at risk of being arbitrary, but that this does not matter much as we also believe that laws of nature are also contingent without considering this problematic.

and we would reach a change at the level of pure normative fact that cannot be explained. So, trying to argue that some pure normative facts are not basic does not solve this issue.

²⁰⁷ It is important to underline the difference between maintaining that there are unexplainable pure normative facts that cannot vary versus maintaining that there are unexplainable pure normative facts that can vary from world to world completely on their own. The second claim appears to be worse than the first, as it implies two things that are problematic: (i) there are facts that are unexplainable and (ii) these facts can unexplainably vary on their own. As far as I understand it, the first claim only implies (i).

I do not think this analogy between the pure normative facts and the laws of nature is perfect. The reason why is because the laws of nature do not have the same force on us as the pure normative facts and as normativity in general have. Obviously, the laws of nature do have some force on us, as they control the natural world. Furthermore, insofar as we want to know the natural truths, the content of these laws has an important hold over our beliefs. However, this is different from the hold that normativity has on us (by extension, pure normative facts will have over us the authority normativity in general has, as they participate in making the mixed normative facts – i.e. our reasons – true). Indeed, contrariwise with the laws of nature, normative laws and normativity in general have a “weaker” hold or power over us than laws of nature, as we could – when things go wrong – act wrongly and make mistakes. By doing so, we would have acted “against” the normative laws, whether we have done it intentionally or not. It seems dubious, at least in ordinary cases, that the same point can be true for the laws of nature. For instance, we cannot act in such a way as to act “against” the law of universal gravitation. As normativity does not have the same hold on us as the laws of nature have, I think the companion in guilt strategy, although true to a certain extent, cannot completely ease the worries associated with the claim that pure normative facts are arbitrary, if metaphysically contingent. Hence, there is an important price to pay in maintaining that pure normative facts are normatively necessary.

4.3.5.2. Mixed Normative Facts and Normative Change

The second reason why it should be denied that pure normative facts are normatively necessary is that this thesis seems inconsistent with the claim that mixed normative facts are partly made true by some non-normative facts. In other terms, and as I will argue, trying to maintain that mixed normative facts can vary without non-normative facts varying (something possible if we believe that pure normative facts can vary by their own) is importantly counterintuitive, and it

should rather be maintained that mixed normative facts vary with non-normative facts even if this means abandoning NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE. Indeed, as I consider that our reasons to believe the claim that mixed normative facts (or our reasons in general) are partly made true by non-normative facts are stronger than our reasons to believe the claim that pure normative facts are normatively necessary, we should drop the claim that pure normative facts are normatively necessary. Here is my argument for the claim that we should deny that pure normative facts are normatively necessary:

- (1) If pure normative facts are normatively (but not metaphysically) necessary, then two situations non-normatively indistinguishable can be normatively different.
- (2) If two situations non-normatively indistinguishable can be normatively different, then it is not the case that mixed normative facts are partly made true by non-normative facts.
- (3) It is the case that mixed normative facts are partly made true by non-normative facts.
- (4) Therefore, pure normative facts are not normatively necessary.

(1) is maintained by contingentists themselves, so I do not think I have to say more about it; but I need to say more about (2) and (3).

If (2) is true, then it would be best to conclude that mixed normative facts are completely made true by pure normative facts, that pure normative facts are the only necessary facts to determine which mixed normative claims are true and which are not. My point is that anyone maintaining that two situations non-normatively indistinguishable can be normatively different will be in a tough position to convince us that non-normative facts really participate in making true some mixed normative claims. She will still be able to say that a world with no non-normative facts cannot be a world with true mixed normative claims, but this is only a weak claim about the conditions of possibility for some mixed normative claims to be true. However, this claim should not be confused with the claim that *these* non-normative facts participate in making mixed normative claims true. Hence, my point here is that non-normative facts have a

more robust role to play in making true mixed normative claims than a “placeholder” role, as I think someone denying the second premise would need to say. Indeed, the difference here is between maintaining that *some* non-normative facts make a mixed normative claim true (a weak claim), versus maintaining that *these specific* non-normative facts make a mixed normative claim true (a stronger claim). I think that, when we think carefully about mixed normative claims and about our reasons, we should maintain the stronger claim. However, someone maintaining that two situations non-normatively indistinguishable can be normatively different could only maintain the weaker claim.²⁰⁸

(3) is supported by the fact that it appears reasonable to believe that mixed normative facts are at least partly made true by non-normative facts. If I have a headache, the fact that I have a *pro tanto* reason to take a pill of ibuprofen is made true by, amongst other non-normative facts, the non-normative fact that I have a headache. Maintaining otherwise would have the consequence of making the notion of a reason for action completely unfathomable and mysterious. Furthermore, some mixed normative facts seem to depend very importantly on some non-normative facts about ourselves, something that Scanlon acknowledges himself. For instance, the fact that I have a *pro tanto* reason not to press this sharp object is partly made true by some non-normative facts about myself, such as the non-normative fact that my flesh is soft and liable to being cut, and that – because of some non-normative facts about my neurophysiological system – cutting myself causes me pain (Scanlon 2014, 94).²⁰⁹ Of course, following Scanlon, we will also say that the fact that I have a *pro tanto* reason not to press this

²⁰⁸ I would like to thank Mike Ashfield for pressing me to make this point clear.

²⁰⁹ Scanlon introduces this example in the context of discussing the independence of normative truths. As he says, even if normative truths are independent of us, they are not independent of what we are like. This is the reason why I have a reason not to press the sharp object in front of me.

sharp object is also made true by a pure normative fact (what is this pure normative fact is not important for the moment, but it could be something like “pain is bad”).

However, if we were believing that pure normative facts are normatively necessary, it would be possible to have the same non-normative facts (my flesh is soft and liable to being cut, etc.) without the fact that I have a *pro tanto* reason not to press the sharp object. In this case, we would have to assume that it is not the case that pain is bad, and hence that it is not the case anymore that I have a *pro tanto* reason not to press the sharp object. In other words, as we would be in a situation where pure normative facts are different, mixed normative facts will also be different. Hence, if this is so, then I think it is best to conclude that the fact that I have a *pro tanto* reason not to press this sharp object is entirely made true by a pure normative fact. Considering that a different mixed normative fact could arise from the same non-normative facts, I think it is best to conclude that non-normative facts have no role to play in making mixed normative claims true. Hence, contingentists must agree that, if pure normative facts are normatively necessary, then both pure normative facts *and* mixed normative facts do not vary with non-normative facts, a claim that may make sense for pure normative facts, but that appears unlikely when applied to mixed normative facts.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ A potential response to this point, suggested to me by David Copp, could consist in applying the following accessibility constraint to normatively possible worlds: for w_2 to be normatively possible relative to w_1 , w_2 must also be non-normatively identical to w_1 . This constraint would have the advantage of blocking the possibility of non-normatively identical but normatively different worlds. In other words, it would have the advantage of blocking the possibility of having a world where the same non-normative facts about myself are true (my flesh is soft and liable to being cut, etc.), but where I do not have a *pro tanto* reason not to press the sharp object. However, I do not consider that this accessibility constraint is completely consistent with the idea of having pure normative facts that are not supposed to vary with non-normative facts. Indeed, if such an accessibility constraint holds, then it seems like pure normative facts do vary with non-normative facts, as for having different pure normative facts we also need to have different non-normative facts. Another possibility could be that, if w_1 and w_2 are non-normatively identical, then they must also be normatively identical, but that two worlds can be normatively identical without being non-normatively identical. This would also block the possibility of non-normatively identical but normatively different worlds. As far as I know, the defenders of the strong contingency strategy do not consider such an option, and I do not see how it could be useful to them. Indeed, they would still need to argue that pure normative facts do

Rather than maintaining that the same non-normative facts could give rise to a different mixed normative fact, I think it is better to affirm (3), and hence maintain that mixed normative facts are partly made true by non-normative facts. Maintaining otherwise, and by the same token maintaining that pure normative facts are normatively necessary, is inconsistent with an essential feature of the notion of reasons: they do depend on some non-normative facts and vary with them. A similar point is even admitted by Rosen (2017d, 135):

Particular [normative] facts²¹¹ are never completely inexplicable. If an act is wrong, there is always something to say why it's wrong, or what makes it wrong. Of course, an act can have one normative feature because it has another. An action can be wrong because it's cruel. But if we then ask why the act is cruel there will always be something to say, at least in principle. And since this can't go on for ever (or so we standardly suppose), the explanation of any particular normative fact will always advert at some point to non-normative features of the act in question.

In this quote, Rosen is talking about explanation, so not strictly about what makes a mixed normative fact (or a particular normative fact) true. But I think there is nevertheless something interesting to take from Rosen's quote: non-normative features are essential to explain why a particular normative fact holds. Hence, it is not possible to maintain that non-normative facts are a mere condition of possibility for normative facts; they have a more robust role to play.

A reply to this last point, according to which maintaining that pure normative facts are normatively necessary implies that mixed normative facts are completely made true by pure normative facts, would consist in saying that it is in virtue of some pure normative facts being the case that non-normative facts partly make true mixed normative facts. In other words, it is because the pure normative fact p attributes some normative relevance to the non-normative fact q that p and q both make true the mixed normative fact r . The normative relevance of q towards r is attributed to q by p ; if p is not the case anymore, then q loses its normative relevance towards

vary with non-normative facts, as it would not be possible anymore to have non-normatively identical worlds that are normatively different.

²¹¹ What Rosen calls a "particular moral/normative fact" is equivalent to a "mixed normative fact".

r. Hence, if *p* is not true at another world, it would be no surprise that *q* does not make *r* true anymore at that world. This line of reply to my argument will then consist in denying that non-normative facts are really participating in making true the mixed normative facts: if non-normative facts are making true some mixed normative facts in virtue of the normative relevance attributed to them by the pure normative facts, then they only participate in making true some mixed normative facts “by accident”. Then, if pure normative facts vary, mixed normative facts will have to vary even if non-normative facts do not vary. This may sound right, but I think we have stronger reasons to believe that this scenario is not quite right or possible, something that casts doubt on Hattiangadi’s positive argument for the claim that pure normative facts are normatively necessary and metaphysically contingent. To try to show why this is the case, I will rely on a point introduced by Marc Lange in his paper “What Would Normative Necessity Be?” (2018).

Lange’s aim is to argue that normative necessity cannot be weaker than metaphysical necessity, as assuming it is does imply counterintuitive conclusions. To show this, Lange proposes to assume that it is morally impermissible (or morally wrong) to torture cats for fun, an assumption that we can easily make. We could also say that this mixed normative fact follows from some non-normative facts about cats (i.e. they are animals that can feel pain) and a pure normative fact (i.e. pain is bad). According to Lange, we should also assume that it is a metaphysical truth that cats are animals, that is to say that it is implied by the nature or essence of what cats are that they are animals.

Considering all this, for the mixed normative fact that it is morally permissible to torture cats for fun to be true, the world will need to be radically different. Indeed, cats will need to be – for instance – robots, not animals, as robots cannot feel pain (for now, at least) while cats can

(Lange 2018, 180). Maintaining that it could be morally permissible to torture cats for fun, while keeping fixed the fact that cats are animals, amounts to maintaining something that is false (Lange 2018, 181).²¹² Hence, if it is a metaphysical necessity that cats are animals, then the moral permissibility of torturing cats for fun is not logically consistent with all the metaphysical necessities. In other words, Lange is arguing that it is not possible to conceive a world identical to ours in all its non-normative respects (including its truths about cats), but where it would be morally permissible to torture cats for fun (in opposition to our world, where torturing cats for fun is morally impermissible). Lange's conclusion here, is that normative necessity cannot be weaker than metaphysical necessity, as by keeping fixed the metaphysically necessary truths and modifying the normatively necessary truths, we reach something false. Indeed, trying to do that leads to a false claim, such as "it is morally permissible to torture cats for fun" even if they are animals (a metaphysically necessary truth according to Lange). I think a similar thing could be said about Scanlon's example of the reason not to press the sharp object in front of me: just as our reasons about how to behave towards cats depend on what cats are and how they are like, my reason not to press this sharp object depends on what I am and how I am like. Hence, it seems dubious that my reason not to press this sharp objection can vary if the non-normative facts about myself do not vary.

Lange's argument, if right, may also point to something wrong with Hattiangadi's argument according to which both (*NTI&M*) and (*NTI&~M*) are ideally conceivable, and then both metaphysically possible. Hattiangadi's point is, I recall, that since there is no *a priori*

²¹² It is not perfectly clear what Lange means by "false" here. This is what Lange says: "Therefore, it must be that had it been morally permissible to 'torture' cat for fun, then cats would still have been animals – and so (since either this metaphysical necessity or the fundamental moral law must fail under this counterfactual antecedent) the fundamental moral law would have been different. This seems false to me" (2018, 180–81). I think that Lange means something stronger than "it is morally false/wrong", such as "we need to assume inconsistent claims to make it possible that it is morally permissible to torture cat", but I am not sure this is really what he intends.

entailment – according to non-naturalists – from *NTI* to *M*, then it is possible to conceive a world where *NTI* is true but *M* false. This is so because $\sim M$ is not inconsistent with anything knowable *a priori*. However, it might be the case that, if it is not possible to have a change at the level of pure normative facts without a change at the level of non-normative facts (as Lange argues), then this shows that it is not the case that $(NTI \& M)$ and $(NTI \& \sim M)$ are both ideally conceivable. Hence, something must be wrong in Hattiangadi's argument.

Hattiangadi and contingentists could reply that we have shown this by assuming that it is a metaphysical necessity that cats are animals, that this necessity cannot be known *a priori*, and that in order to evaluate what is ideally conceivable we have to evaluate only what an ideally rational being can know *a priori*. I do not know if an ideally rational being can know *a priori* that cats are animals, but if such a being can know this, then it seems to be the case that $(NTI \& M)$ and $(NTI \& \sim M)$ are not both ideally conceivable. However, in order to settle this issue, we would need to further explore what an ideally rational being can know *a priori*, and this would take us too far from the main point of this section.

Nonetheless, I think Lange's conclusion supports my point according to which it is not possible to conceive of a case where the same non-normative facts will make true different mixed normative truths, unless we bite the bullet and agree to maintain that mixed normative facts are not partly made true by non-normative facts.²¹³ However, I do not think biting this bullet is an interesting option, even for non-naturalists. In any case, I consider that what has been said in the previous paragraphs provides good reasons to believe that there is an important price

²¹³ In Lange's example, we need to change some non-normative facts about cats (from "cats are animals" to "cats are robots") in order to make sense of the change in mixed normative truths (from "it is morally impermissible to torture cats" to "it is morally permissible to torture cats").

to pay in maintaining that pure normative facts are normatively necessary, insofar as normative necessity is understood as being weaker than metaphysical necessity.

4.3.5.3. Normative Necessity and Knowledge

The third reason why we should deny that pure normative facts are normatively necessary is that it seems inconsistent with Scanlon's view about how we could get to know these facts. I will also show that maintaining that pure normative facts are normatively necessary makes the epistemological story non-naturalists have to provide mysterious. I will show this by introducing an imperfect disjunctive choice to the contingentists: either they maintain that we can know pure normative facts *a priori*, but then they must agree that we may not be able to apprehend a change at the level of pure normative facts; or they maintain that we can know pure normative facts *a posteriori*, but then they must agree that we could be systematically wrong as a world with different pure normative facts could be non-normatively identical to ours. I will also discuss, following Hattiangadi, why this disjunctive choice is imperfect.

The most sensible option for contingentists to account for our knowledge of pure normative facts is to say that we can get to know them *a priori*. This is supported by the claim that pure normative truths neither depend on nor vary with non-normative facts. Hence, it seems most likely that we can know, for instance, that pain is bad, merely by thinking carefully about it. This is also what Scanlon seems to believe. As he says: "It seems that we can discover normative truths and mathematical truths simply by thinking about these subjects in the right way" (2014, 70). This seems indeed to suggest that, as for (most) mathematical truths, we could discover normative truths, and more specifically pure normative truths, *a priori*. Scanlon also maintains that, insofar as we start with a set of considered judgments about our reasons, we could get to know the normative truths by using the method of reflective equilibrium: our considered

judgments about our reasons have to be assessed by the “*process of pursuing* reflective equilibrium”, a process that inherently appeals to general principles that would account for our considered judgments (Scanlon 2014, 84; emphasis in the original). Even though our general principles will also be specified by this process of pursuing reflective equilibrium, it is not the case – at least for Scanlon – that the process itself is giving us general principles. We started the process with general principles, and, in a sense, these principles – even our considered version of them – are not the result of the process of pursuing reflective equilibrium. This process is more something like a means to discover which of our judgments about our reasons and about the general normative principles are considered. This seems to be something that we can perfectly do *a priori*.

However, it is not clear that such a conception of how we know pure normative facts is completely consistent with maintaining that these facts are normatively necessary. Indeed, assuming we could get to know these facts by thinking carefully about them and in the right way, how could we possibly apprehend a change at the level of these facts? And if we cannot account for such an apprehension, should it not suggest that this method is not reliable? Should it not mean that we could be systematically mistaken about the pure normative facts true at our world?

To be clear, the problem I am trying to picture is not necessarily with whether we could know normative facts *a priori*, but rather with the consistency of such a view with normative necessity. Indeed, if we think that we can know pure normative facts *a priori*, or by thinking about them in the right way, then it seems like we will have a hard time explaining how we could still know them when they vary. As Rosen explains, when pure normative facts vary from world to world, then “the truths about what we are justified in believing must also vary” (2017c, 873). However, unless our method to apprehend the pure normative truths changes or adapts to the

variation of pure normative facts, it is not clear that we can say that we know, in our world, the pure normative facts. Without an answer to this issue, the best conclusion seems to be that, if we know the pure normative truths, this is completely due to epistemic luck.²¹⁴

Nevertheless, contingentists could deny that we can know normative facts *a priori*, to maintain that we actually know these facts *a posteriori*. However, if we were to know these facts *a posteriori*, then it seems like we would need to rely on non-normative evidence to apprehend the pure normative facts (“non-normative evidence” is understood here widely, as encompassing – for instance – our reactions to states of affairs). Most likely, this evidence will give us what is necessary to apprehend the pure normative truths of our world. However, since it is possible for pure normative truths to be different without non-normative facts being different, it seems like, once again, our knowledge of pure normative facts will be completely due to epistemic luck. The reason why this is so is that the non-normative facts could very well be misleading, as worlds with the same non-normative facts could have completely different pure normative facts. In such a world, we would have the same reactions to the same states of affairs, but because the pure normative facts do not “cooperate” with the non-normative facts, our normative beliefs will most likely be systematically false. Hence, as it is not clear that the non-normative evidence is reliable, it is dubious that we could know pure normative facts *a posteriori*. Again, if we know the pure normative facts, this is completely due to epistemic luck.

However, Hattiangadi maintains that contingentists can argue that, while we cannot know pure normative facts *a priori*, our knowledge of these facts is not *a posteriori* either (2018, 608). Hattiangadi says that we should follow Timothy Williamson (2005) and maintain that our knowledge of counterfactuals is neither strictly *a priori* nor strictly *a posteriori* and that there is

²¹⁴ Väyrynen makes a similar point about moral luck (2017, 182).

actually a grey area between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge. Hattiangadi says that our knowledge of pure normative facts may be somewhere in this grey area. A reason to maintain this, according to Hattiangadi, is that our knowledge of pure normative facts “can involve varying degrees of sensitivity to evidence” (2018, 608). However, I do not think that this is very helpful, as pure normative facts (I assume here that pure normative facts are counterfactuals) do not seem to behave like counterfactuals about the natural world. Indeed, as pure normative facts do not vary with non-normative facts, and as different pure normative facts can be true while the same non-normative facts are true, it seems like the sensitivity to evidence of pure normative facts is, very low at best, nil at worst. Hence, when we consider pure normative facts, it seems like non-normative evidence is useless.

Thus, my point here is that, if it is the case that pure normative facts are normatively necessary, then most likely we cannot know them. If I am right about this point, believing in NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE rather than SUPERVENIENCE does not seem to represent a clear advantage for non-naturalists. My conclusion is then that, considering all the issues with normative necessity, I think there would be an important price to pay for non-naturalists to maintain NORMATIVE SUPERVENIENCE. And if, as I believe, the strong contingency strategy is the best indirect strategy available to non-naturalists to respond to the problem of supervenience, and if, as the third chapter showed, a direct reply to this same problem is unlikely, we should conclude that the problem of supervenience is much more worrisome than non-naturalists usually seem to believe.

Conclusion

In this thesis, my main point has been to argue that non-naturalists do not have a compelling response to the problem of supervenience. In this brief conclusion, I will recap my argument and say what exactly non-naturalists could do from now on. Before doing that, let me recall, first, how I defined non-naturalism, and second, what exactly is the problem of supervenience.

In Chapter 1, I defined normative non-naturalism as the conjunction of the two following claims:

- (1) The core claim: there are non-natural normative truths.
- (3) Robust non-naturalism: there are both non-natural normative truths and non-natural normative properties and facts.

And I suggested that (3) should be itself understood as being roughly about these two other following claims:

- (4) Existence: there are instances of normative properties.
- (5) Negative: normative properties are metaphysically *sui generis*.

In other words, normative non-naturalism is the view according to which there are non-natural normative truths, there are normative properties (and actual instances of them) and facts (we have normative facts insofar as we understand them as instantiations of normative properties), and these properties (and facts) are metaphysically *sui generis*. What this last commitment implies is that normative properties are *metaphysically discontinuous* with non-normative properties: normative properties' nature cannot be understood in terms of non-normative properties' nature.

Non-naturalists face many different issues, one of them being the problem of supervenience. In Chapter 2, I argued, following McPherson, that the problem of supervenience should be understood as the conjunction of the three following claims:

SUPERVENIENCE: No metaphysically possible world that is identical to a second world in all base respects can be different from the second world in its normative respects.

BRUTE CONNECTION: The non-naturalist must take the supervenience of the normative properties on the base properties to involve a brute necessary connection between discontinuous properties.

MODEST HUMEAN: Commitment to brute necessary connections between discontinuous properties counts significantly against a view.

This is a simple, straightforward, and very compelling metaphysical problem for non-naturalism. The problem could be addressed by denying any of the three claim. My argument, developed throughout this thesis, is that it is does not appear plausible for non-naturalists to deny any of these claims. In section 2.3.4, I argued that MODEST HUMEAN seems to be safe against the main challenge that it is facing: Wielenberg's challenge. Indeed, although Wielenberg believes that MODEST HUMEAN is self-undermining as it would itself imply a brute necessary connection between discontinuous entities, I do not consider this challenge successful. In other words, I do not think MODEST HUMEAN is self-undermining, as I do not think it implies a brute necessary connection between discontinuous entities. There are many ways to argue for this point; I think the most compelling consists in denying that MODEST HUMEAN implies a necessary connection at all.

In Chapter 3, I argued that non-naturalists do not have any compelling account of the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties, suggesting that they must see this necessary connection as being brute, which also suggests that they cannot deny BRUTE CONNECTION. I argued for this point by assessing different options non-naturalists do take and could take to explain the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties, and by showing that none of them can satisfy the two following persuasive criteria that any denial of BRUTE CONNECTION should satisfy:

- (i) If a response to the problem of supervenience implies a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities, it should provide an explanation of this connection or justify why an explanation is not required.
- (ii) If a response to the problem of supervenience does not imply a new necessary connection between discontinuous entities, it should avoid merely reaffirming in other terms the same necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties stated by SUPERVENIENCE.

The fact that no non-naturalist answer satisfies these two criteria suggests to me that non-naturalists cannot deny BRUTE CONNECTION unless they drop one of their core commitments, namely the claim that normative properties are metaphysically discontinuous with non-normative properties. This may be devastating for non-naturalists, as it may mean abandoning what defines non-naturalism.

In Chapter 4, I assessed different attempts at denying SUPERVENIENCE. This has been a less popular option amongst non-naturalists than trying to deny BRUTE CONNECTION, but some non-naturalists argue that SUPERVENIENCE should be denied as a strong necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative is not required to explain normativity. I argued that the attempts at denying SUPERVENIENCE that are going far enough to respond to the problem of supervenience face important difficulties. These difficulties are multiple and diverse, and I will not summarize them all here, but the main ones have to do with our use of interworld counterfactuals (something that suggests that SUPERVENIENCE must hold) in thinking about normativity, with the possibility that we could not get to know non-normative facts if they were able to be different in two non-normatively indistinguishable worlds, and with our incapacity to explain normative change without also referring to a non-normative change.

Assuming non-naturalists agree with my argument, I think there are four avenues they could still pursue (I rank them from “most unlikely to be interesting or succeed” to “most likely to be interesting or succeed”):

- (i) Introducing an explanation of the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties that does satisfy the two criteria mentioned earlier.
- (ii) Introducing a way of denying the necessary connection between normative and non-normative properties that does not run into problems.
- (iii) Trying to modify non-naturalism's core commitments in such a way that the problem of supervenience cannot arise anymore.
- (iv) Agreeing that it is not possible to reply to the problem of supervenience, but arguing that this is not a reason to reject non-naturalism.

Only the third and fourth avenues really appear appealing to me. Regarding (iii), I think non-naturalists could evaluate the possibility of modifying their core theoretical commitments so that the problem of supervenience cannot arise anymore. I think the only way to do so would consist in dropping the claim that normative properties are metaphysically discontinuous with non-normative properties. Non-naturalists could then try to argue that normative properties are importantly different than non-normative or natural properties (hence still deserving the label “non-naturalism”) without this implying that they are metaphysically discontinuous with non-normative or natural properties. However, I doubt that this could be argued without collapsing non-naturalism into non-reductionist naturalism; but if it could, then non-naturalists could have their cake and eat it too.

Although I think non-naturalists and their critics will disagree about the force of (iv), I think it is important to recall that all MODEST HUMEAN says is that a commitment to a brute necessary connection between discontinuous entities counts *significantly* against a view. For instance, non-naturalists could acknowledge that the problem of supervenience does count significantly against their view, but argue that, since there are many other good reasons (to be determined) to believe in their view, the fact that they cannot respond to the problem of supervenience is not too damaging. I can see non-naturalists trying to argue for this point, but I

can also see critics of non-naturalists saying that these other reasons to believe in non-naturalism are not strong enough to overcome the problem of supervenience.

Non-naturalists could also say that the problem of supervenience is overrated and that the requirements (i.e. the two criteria mentioned in section 3.1) a response should satisfy are set too high. Indeed, I can imagine some non-naturalists saying that we should not be too much disturbed by that fact that non-naturalism introduces a necessary connection between discontinuous entities. I can also imagine some non-naturalists saying that some of the views discussed in Chapter 3 could be deemed acceptable if the requirements to respond to the problem of supervenience were not set as high as I set them. The problem of supervenience would then fail to be a reason to reject non-naturalism, either because it fails to identify something problematic or because I imposed requirements that are too high (and perhaps impossible to meet). However, I do not consider these potential replies as appealing, as I neither consider the problem of supervenience overrated nor the requirements I imposed unreasonable. I do not consider the problem of supervenience overrated as I believe that the capacity to provide a proper explanation of the necessary connection between the normative and the non-normative that many non-naturalists themselves maintain should play an important role in our metaethical or metanormative inquiry. Furthermore, I take the requirements I imposed to be reasonable, as they rely themselves on plausible epistemic principles, such as that we should not believe in a necessary connection between entities that are metaphysically discontinuous if we cannot explain it.

In any case, if non-naturalists opt for (iv), it means that they somehow agree that they cannot reply to the problem of supervenience. If they agree to that, it most likely means that the argument deployed throughout this thesis has been deemed cogent by non-naturalists themselves. Although this may not be a knockout yet, it is an important strike against non-naturalism.

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